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**COLLATERAL DAMAGE:  
EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF MATERNAL INCARCERATION ON THE SOCIAL,  
EMOTIONAL, BEHAVIORAL AND EDUCATIONAL FUNCTIONING OF CHILDREN:  
RELEASED MOTHERS' PERSPECTIVES**

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of my mother, Ossie, who departed this life way too soon, but left me with a deep understanding of the meaning of the word fortitude by the way she lived her life and overcame adversity. She instilled in me the Faith that allows me to know that I have a spirit within me that can accomplish all that I seek to accomplish. I know now that He that is within me is truly greater than he that is in the world.

This work is also dedicated with much love to my sister Garnet who has been the iron in my life since the passing of our mother. I have always looked up to her as a big sister and credit her for stimulating my desire to learn. She has enriched my spiritual growth and development through her Winds of Change Ministries and encouraged me in all my endeavors.

Last but not least, I dedicate this work to my husband Donell, my son Dorian and my brother Frank. Thank you for always being there and encouraging me throughout this process.

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**COLLATERAL DAMAGE: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF MATERNAL INCARCERATION ON  
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**ROBERTA TREADWAY GASTON**

**ABSTRACT**

The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that women continue to be incarcerated at record numbers. The majority of these women are mothers to children under the age of 18. Consequently more and more children are being negatively effected as a result of this forced separation from their mothers.

The research on children with an incarcerated mother documents the adverse impact on the well-being of the children left behind. The children experience a range of difficulties including emotional and psychological difficulties, educational problems and behavioral difficulties. Children who have a mother in prison or jail have been labeled as among the riskiest of the high risk children in our nation. Despite these documented harms there are limited studies on how children of incarcerated mothers suffer.

Five previously incarcerated mothers participated in individual interviews designed to obtain their perspectives about any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children experienced during their term of incarceration. The mothers were also asked to report their perceptions of any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children experienced upon reunification. Additionally, the mothers discussed what types of assistance could have been beneficial to their children in experiencing fewer problems.

This social problem is important to study because it has serious ramifications for an entire generation of children. It will also help to shed light on the problem of increased incarceration of women and will give voice to their plight as well as the plight of their children.

Results of the study supported the assumption that previously incarcerated mothers would report that their children experienced a range of difficulties including social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties both during the time the mother was incarcerated and upon reunification with the mother. The results also indicate that mothers believe that their children could benefit from interventions such as individual and group counseling to assist them in suffering less social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties during their absence and after reunification.



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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

#### **Statement of the Problem and Its Significance**

“Children whose mothers are in prison or jail are among the riskiest of the high risk children in our nation” (Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, & Kennon, 1999, p. 11). These children are in danger of entering a spiral of social disenfranchisement and criminal activity, often resulting in their own incarceration (Amnesty International Fact Sheet).

These poignant statements highlight the plight of a special population of children who suffer the adverse side effects of their mother’s incarceration including significant emotional, behavioral, psychological and educational difficulties (Myers et al., 1999). These children historically have received little attention because they typically are not perceived as victims. However, children suffer greatly when their mothers are incarcerated.

In 1978, McGowan and Blumenthal published a study of children of women prisoners. They found that in spite of interest in the rights of children, women, and prisoners, the children of women prisoners had virtually been ignored. They noted that

our society punishes children for the crimes of their parents. Additionally, they indicate that while these children are not stoned, flogged, exiled, or placed into servitude, they often are removed abruptly from their homes, schools, and communities. They are shuttled from one caretaker to another, sometimes deprived of seeing their parents or siblings. Their peers often tease and avoid them and they are left to comprehend on their own what is happening (McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978). Other researchers (Johnston, 1995; Myers et al., 1999) have linked maternal incarceration with social, emotional, behavioral and educational/cognitive difficulties among the children.

As the number of women inmate increases, the number of children adversely affected also increases. Women represent the fastest growing segment of the expanding United States prison population (Greenfield & Snell, 2000). More women are incarcerated now than at any other time in our country's history. Since 1986, the number of women in prison has increased 400%. For African American women the increase is 800% (Green, Haney, & Hurtado, 2000). According to Harrison and Beck (2006), the incarceration rate for African American women was 317 per 100,000, more than twice the rate for Hispanic females and four times higher than the rate for white females.

In 1981, there were 1400 women in federal facilities. By 1987, that number had increased to over 5000 (Wheeler, 2000). In 1991, there were more than 47,000 women in state and federal prison. By 1998, approximately 83,000 women were in state and federal facilities, representing 6.4% of all prisoners in the United States. Another 63,000



women were in jails (Green et al., 2000). At year end 2003, 101,179 women were in state or federal institutions.

Laws enacted to fight drug related crimes have contributed to the increase in the number of incarcerated women (Young & Smith, 2000). Mandatory sentencing minimums and other strict federal sentencing guideline account for a large portion of the increase in the female prison population. Roberts (1995) dubs the war on drugs as a war on women. She notes that under some state laws such as the Rockefeller Drug Laws in New York, a first-time, non-violent drug offender possessing four ounces of cocaine or heroin could be subject to a mandatory sentence of 15 years to life. This criminal prosecution most directly punishes poor African American women who reside in poor inner-city neighborhoods. Deborah Small (2001) characterizes the situation as, "...the principle engine driving the criminal justice system and the high rates of incarceration is the United States government's relentless and racist pursuit of the 'war on drugs'" (p. 12). She goes on to indicate that while the United States drug policies are superficially neutral, they are enforced in a manner that is biased and has resulted in a system of apartheid justice. She also notes that, "crack sentencing is the modern equivalent of Jim Crow laws that reinforced post slavery discrimination" (p. 12).

Approximately 80% of incarcerated women are mothers. Most are single parents and the sole breadwinner for their families; they leave behind more than one million children (Arbor & Gage, 1995). Approximately two-thirds of these children are under 18 years of age. They tend to experience feelings of anger, fear, grief, shame, rejection and loneliness. They often have poor school performance and may exhibit aggressive

behaviors. Additionally, many of these children are exposed to the criminogenic factors that contributed to their mothers' incarceration, which increases the likelihood that they will later engage in some type of criminal behavior (Green et al., 2000).

In my work as an educator and a psychologist I have observed an increase in the numbers of children enrolled in the public schools that have incarcerated mothers. I have worked in a variety of diverse school districts and have seen children adversely affected at all socio-economic levels. These children are often viewed as problematic and labeled high risk because of educational difficulties and behavior problems.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The number of incarcerated mothers has increased dramatically in the past twenty-five years. When mothers go to prison their children suffer in a number of ways. The problem is that maternal separation due to incarceration can negatively affect the emotional, social, behavioral, psychological and educational development and functioning of children. Difficulties such as aggressive behavior and withdrawal (Baunach, 1985), criminal involvement (Johnston, 1991, 1992), and depression and concentration problems (Kampfner, 1995) have been documented in these children.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was conducted to investigate a very sensitive and serious social issue that has ramifications for an entire generation of children: children separated from their mothers due to incarceration. The primary focus of the investigation was to identify the social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties children of incarcerated

mothers may experience, based on their mother's perceptions/perspective. Secondly, this study will give a critical voice to the plight of these children.

### **Significance of the Study**

The rate of female incarceration continues to rise in our society. The majority of these women are incarcerated because of some type of drug offense. Most incarcerated women are mothers to children under the age of 13 and were primary caregivers prior to imprisonment (Arbor & Gage, 1995). As more women are incarcerated, more children are adversely affected in a number of ways. Of primary importance is the fact that children separated from a mother due to incarceration suffer from social, emotional, behavioral and educational problems. Without knowledge of the harms these children face our society runs the risk of having generations of children suffer the adverse collateral consequences of maternal incarceration.

This study provides an in-depth view of what individual women saw as their children's difficulties resulting from the mother's incarceration. It provides information on the types of support needed for this fragile population of children. It also provides valuable information to the various agencies that work with children who have an incarcerated mother and need to be reminded to network and coordinate their efforts and resources on behalf of the children.

This study contributes to the very limited body of research on this high risk group of children and the trauma they suffer when separated from their mothers due to incarceration. It also can be used to enhance the knowledge base of what is happening in our society as a result of the high rate of incarceration of women with children.

## **Research Questions**

This investigation will address the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding their incarceration, and any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children experienced during the separation from their mothers?
2. What are the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding their incarceration and any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children experienced after reunification with their mothers?
3. What are the mothers' perceptions regarding the types of interventions that could have been beneficial to their children in experiencing less social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties?

## **Limitations of the Study**

One of the limitations of this study is the paucity of research available on the topic of the impact of maternal incarceration on the emotional, social, behavioral and educational functioning in their children. A great deal of the literature examines what happens to the mothers as a result of their incarceration. However, few studies directly examine the lives and outcomes of children who have a mother incarcerated. In addition, the results of most studies on the topic are confounded by other variables such as living arrangements of the children, poverty, violent neighborhoods and other pre-incarceration factors.

Secondly, this study is limited in the fact that the information obtained about the difficulties these children face is reported by the mothers and not directly by the children. The focus of this study is on mothers' beliefs about their children; direct data from the children that could confirm the issues identified by the mothers was not secured.

Additionally, a third limitation would be the issue of a lack of verification of the information provided by the mothers by other significant individuals in the child's life such as teachers, church members, grandparents, and friends.

A fourth and important limitation of this study is the issue of the individual bias of this researcher as a woman, a mother and an African-American. These characteristics perhaps fuel my desire to take a critical look at the issue of female incarceration. As I have grown in the knowledge of the fact that African-American women are seven times more likely to go to prison than Caucasian women (Davis, 2000).

I have also grown in the knowledge that this imprisonment of women of color is often viewed as the result of a racist society. Engelbert (2001) notes that Black women are given harsher sentences for the same or lesser crimes than White women. She suggested that this clearly tells us that racial differences exist at every level of the correctional and legal system. Roberts (1995) notes that by imposing criminal sanctions against poor Black women, the government perpetuates the historical devaluation of Black women as mothers and denies them a facet of their humanity. As a result the children suffer greatly. Justice Harry Blackman once stated, "In order to get beyond

racism we must first take account of race. There is no other way” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p.x).

### **Definition of Terms**

Definitions are provided to clarify the meaning of terms used in this study. The following terms will be used.

*African American:* A term used to describe Americans of African descent. This term will be used to denote individuals also referred to as Black Americans.

*Behavioral difficulties:* Acting out behaviors that are inappropriate, at times out of control and tend to get the individual into trouble.

*Correctional institution/facility:* A federal or state prison or local jail used to detain a person convicted of a crime.

*Criminogenic factors:* Those negative factors which contribute to a criminal lifestyle such as substance abuse, child abuse, domestic violence, illiteracy, etc.

*Drugs:* Illicit substances that are illegal to possess for personal use and that, when used have some mind altering effect or produce physiological changes in the body, i.e. cocaine, crack, heroin, marijuana, LSD, amphetamines etc.

*Educational difficulties:* A lack of progress at grade level in areas of reading, math, language arts and other academic areas.

*Emotional difficulties:* inappropriate feelings and interpersonal relationships with peers and adults.

*Federal prison:* A building/facility operated by the federal government for the purpose of confinement of individuals convicted of a crime.

*Foster Care:* A term describing a variety of full-time substitute care for children outside their parental home by individuals other than their parents.

*Impact:* The adverse effect of maternal incarceration.

*Incarceration:* To be confined to a federal or state prison or a local jail facility.

*Inmate:* An individual, male or female detained in a federal, or state prison or local jail.

*Inner city:* The central sections of a large city, usually viewed as impoverished.

*Jail:* A local facility within a city or town used to confine an individual for a period of time once they have been convicted of a crime.

*Prisoner:* A person held in custody or a condition of restraint. Prisoners are also referred to as inmates, convicts, clients, and residents.

*Social difficulties:* An unwillingness to conform to social norms and an inability to demonstrate appropriate social skills.

*State prison:* A building/facility operated by a state government for the purpose of confinement of individuals convicted of a crime.

*Substance abuse:* The use of narcotics such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana and other illicit substances to the point of addiction.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

A review of related literature on the topic of incarcerated mothers and their children was conducted in order to provide a framework of background information important to this study on the adverse impact of a mother's incarceration on the well-being of her children. The primary purpose of the study is to identify previously incarcerated mothers' perceptions regarding the impact of their incarceration on the social, emotional, behavioral and educational well-being of their children. The questions to be addressed in the study include: What are mothers perceptions regarding the impact of their incarceration on the social, emotional, behavioral and educational functioning of their young children?; and What are mothers' perceptions regarding factors that could help their children experience less social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties?

The introduction of this literature review presents an overview on the issue of increased incarceration of mothers and its affect on the well-being of their young children. The next section provides a brief critical race view on the issue of incarceration of mothers. The third section provides a literature review on the social profile of



incarcerated mothers. In section four, the researcher presents a review of the literature on the children of incarcerated mothers and how they are affected by separation due to incarceration. Section five describes how children of incarcerated mothers suffer from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The final section of the chapter provides the reader with a review of suggested interventions that could help minimize the trauma suffered by these children.

### **Introduction**

“Children are the greatest resource that man has to offer because they are, always have been, and will continue to be our future” (Anonymous, 1982).

Over 17,000 children are separated from their mothers each year due to incarceration (Woolf, 2005). The most serious collateral consequence of a mother’s incarceration is the breakup of her family and the detrimental impact on her children. Incarceration of mothers has immediate as well as long-term effects on her children. It places significant emotional, psychological and social burdens on the children and often adversely affects life chances (Bush-Baskette, 2000). According to Bloom and Steinhart (1993), when a mother is separated from her children due to incarceration, the children often grieve as though the mother has died. In addition these children experience feelings of sadness, anxiety, and fear. They may display verbal and/or physical aggression, hyper vigilance, withdrawal or sexualized behavior (Johnston, 1995).

The difficulties that children experience due to a mothers’ incarceration are greater than when a child’s father is incarcerated. Typically, the mother was a single parent at the time of her arrest and incarceration and the sole support for her children.

Young (2000) highlights this fact: “Born of ancient tradition and established gender roles, women continue to be the principal child-care providers in most families.” With the rapidly increasing female population in prisons (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2003), special attention must be given to children affected by maternal incarceration.

### **Critical Race Perspective**

The critical approach will be utilized to highlight the fact that the increased rates of imprisonment of women in general, and African American women specifically, has a ripple effect throughout society. The stigma attached to a woman’s incarceration often leads to feelings of disgust from others in society. When these women return from prison they are rarely successful in finding employment, financial resources or a place to live. They are unable to make a positive contribution to their communities or to their families and children.

Critical race theory focuses on the role of “voice” and attempts to inject the cultural viewpoints of people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2002). Critical race theorists believe that “racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status, and that racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs and the best schools” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.17). In general, critical race theory scholars examine how deeply issues of race and power dominate the American way of life. When addressing the issue of increased incarceration of women, especially the tremendous increase in African American women, critical race theory looks at the intersection of race and gender. Roberts (1995) writes “a growing number of women across the country have been charged with criminal offenses after giving birth to babies who test

positive for drugs” (p.348). The majority of these women are poor and Black. Roberts notes that the prosecution of addicted African American women involves two fundamental problems. The first problem is that through punishing a woman for drug use during pregnancy, the legal system pits the issue of protecting the health of the fetus against the mother’s independence over her body. Secondly, it does not propose an alternative solution to increased incarceration, such as treatment to help these women. By imposing criminal sanctions against poor Black women the government perpetuates the historical devaluation of Black women as mothers and denies them a facet of their humanity.

Roberts (1995) suggests that Black women face various forms of oppression simultaneously. She indicates that the prosecution of poor drug-addicted/drug-involved Black mothers is a result of an inseparable combination of gender, economic status and race. She goes on to note that the devaluation of Black women as mothers originated because of the slave experience and has been perpetuated by the American society (Roberts, 1995). Roberts goes on to illuminate the idea that a racial hierarchy in our society continues to violate poor Black women’s reproductive rights. The system advocates a standard of motherhood that is offensive to the principles of both racial equity and privacy, while our constitution gives a guarantee of liberty and equity to all.

Roberts (1995) notes that crack cocaine first appeared in America in the early 1980’s and became popular among inner-city women, to epidemic proportions. In addition to the women who participated in some form of drug abuse and/or trafficking, a great majority of these women were pregnant and gave birth while incarcerated. They

also often leave behind young children who suffer the trauma of being separated from their mothers. The response of the judicial system has consistently been punitive to mothers who are arrested for crack use.

### **Social Profile of the Mothers**

Engelbert (2001) describes the typical female prisoner as poor, suffering from substance abuse, lacking formal education and having a history of being sexually and/or physically abused. The American Correctional Association (1987) elaborates on that profile and describes the average adult female offender as a minority between the ages of 25 and 29, and a single parent with three children.

She comes from a single parent or broken home. She is a high school dropout, unemployed, likely to have been the victim of sexual abuse, started using alcohol or drugs between the ages of 13 and 14, and has committed crimes to pay for drugs, relieve economic pressures or because of poor judgment (p. 7).

Between the years 1991-2000, there was an 87% increase in the numbers of women incarcerated (Park & Stewart, 2002). The United States Department of Justice Statistics indicates that on any given day there are nearly 84,000 women in federal and state prisons and approximately 70,000 in county jails (Greenfield & Snell, 2000). Harrison and Beck (2004) reported that about one in every 1,600 women were sentenced prisoners under the jurisdiction of state and federal authorities. By the end of 2003, 101,179 women were incarcerated in state or federal facilities. They note that since the problems with the crack epidemic in the 1980's, the numbers of incarcerated women have increased at approximately a 10% annual rate. Between midyear 2005 and 2006, the female prison population reached 111,403 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

There is a significant differential impact by race as to who ends up serving time in prison. African American women are 7 times more likely to be incarcerated than white women (Sokoloff, 2005). The confinement of African American women has grown exponentially in the past two decades. While almost half the female prison population is African American, only 13 percent of the United States female population is African American (Sokoloff, 2005).

The United States Department of Justice Report on Women in the Criminal Justice System (Mumola, 2000), indicates that this increase in the number of women incarcerated is accompanied by an awareness that a substantial proportion of women are detained because of their drug involvement. Mumola (2000) notes that, "During the past decade, both drug offenses and the number of female offenders who are substance abusers have increased dramatically" (p.8). The report indicates that in 1994, 67% of female offenders tested positive for drugs. African American women are also disproportionately represented for overall women incarcerated for drug offenses. There is clearly a racialized nature to women's incarceration for drug offenses.

Incarcerated women are more likely to abuse cocaine and opiates and are more likely to have regularly used drugs, used a needle, used illegal drugs and to have been under the influence of drugs at the time of their offense (Mumola, 2000). The Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) Program reported that an average of 68% of adult female arrestees tested positive for either cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, opiates or PCP during 2003 (Zhang, 2003). Even after incarceration, more than half of

the women in some facilities receive drugs like Librium on a daily basis. These women are given more psychotropic drugs than incarcerated males (Watterson, 1996).

Covington (2004) takes the position that, the increase in the rate of female incarceration appears to be the result of policies that have come about over the past two decades. Included in these policies are our government's policies that prescribe simplistic, punitive enforcement responses for complex social problems; federal and state mandatory sentencing laws; and the public's fear of crime. This includes the war on drugs and the shift in legal and academic realms toward a view that discounts the structural and social causes of crime.

Chesney-Lind (2002) view the increase in female incarceration as the unintended consequence of our government's push for mass incarceration because of the war on drugs and a number of other get tough on crime policies. They note that the substantial increase in female incarceration rates is not any substantial increase in women's involvement in any serious crime, but rather a reflection of public policy decisions that often times ignore any consideration of women's needs or behaviors.

Incarcerated women are typically in worse economic circumstances than either incarcerated men or other economically disadvantaged women (Mumola, 2000). One in five of these women report being homeless during the year prior to their arrest (Gable & Johnson, 1995). Eighty percent of incarcerated women report income of less than \$12,000 in the year before their arrest, and 92% report income under \$10,000 (Greenfield & Snell, 2000, Ruiz, 2002).

Women serving their time in state prisons report that they were employed either full or part-time in the month preceding their arrest. Only 39% of mothers report holding a full-time job prior to their arrest. Fifty-one percent of incarcerated mothers had personal income below \$600 in the month prior to their arrest and another 35% had personal income below \$2000. Other sources of income include receiving money from family and friends, illegal sources and public assistance; 35% of incarcerated women were receiving welfare assistance prior to their arrest (Travis & Waul, 2004). Child support accounted for about 6% of mothers' income (Travis, Cincotta & Solomon, 2003).

Incarcerated women present with varying levels of education. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999), the majority of women involved with the justice system are at least high school graduates. An estimated 55% of those in local jails, 56% of those in State prisons, and 73% of those in Federal prison have completed high school. At the other end of the spectrum, an estimated 12% of those in local jails have only an eighth grade education or less, 7% of those in State prisons and 8% of those in Federal prisons have only an eighth grade education or less.

The majority of incarcerated women are mothers. An estimated 70% of women held in jails, 65% of women in State prisons and 59% of women in federal prison have children under the age of 18 (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). One in four incarcerated women is either pregnant or postpartum at the time of imprisonment. Ninety percent of pregnant incarcerated women give birth while serving their time, but most prisons have no facilities for giving birth. Most prisons are not equipped to allow an infant to remain with the mother. These infants remain with their mothers for as little as two days to as

long as two years (Watterson, 1996; Arbor & Gage, 1995). Only a few facilities in the United States have programs where mothers and their infants can be together. Consequently it is difficult for the mother to develop a bond to the infant or for the infant to bond with the mother and form an attachment to her. This attachment is an important developmental milestone for both the mothers and infants (Park & Stewart, 2002; Bowlby, 1988).

Ninety percent of incarcerated women are single mothers. Nearly half of these women have never been married (Greenfeld & Snell, 2000; Ruiz, 2002). During 1999, women incarcerated in federal and state prisons or county jails were mothers to an estimated 1.5 million children (Peterkin, 2003). Incarcerated mothers face unique challenges. Their incarceration has an even greater adverse effect on her children than when a father is incarcerated. Since most incarcerated women are single mothers and poverty has been associated with single female heads of households (Ruiz, 2002), it stands to reason that the children in these households also suffer the negative impact of living in poverty. Incarcerated mothers are often the sole support for their families and without their presence the community, as well as their families become weakened.

Incarcerated mothers consistently report feelings of concern and love for the children they leave behind. They express a desire to maintain regular contact with their children (Kampfner, 1995). McGowan and Blumenthal (1978) reported that mothers are concerned about who will protect their children and who will make certain that they get the required education, health care, and social services. Watterson (1996) notes that



social service agencies and the welfare departments are known for their inability to keep mothers informed about their children's well-being.

### **Who Are the Children – What Is the Impact**

Researchers believe that over 10 million kids have experienced the incarceration of a parent at some point in their lives. Made virtual orphans by the drug war and other "tough on crime" measures that have sent the prison population skyrocketing to a record 2 million (Peterkin, 2003, p. 20).

Ten million is only an estimate because no individual agency is responsible for collecting information about children with an incarcerated parent (Myers, et al., 1999; Johnston, 1995; Virginia Commission on Youth, 1993). Surratt (2003) notes that "Of the 93,000 women incarcerated in 2001, nearly 80% were mothers of approximately 130,000 minor children" (p.206). Most of these children were less than ten years old and about 20% were under the age of five (Mumola, 2000). These numbers do not represent an absolute count of the numbers of children adversely affected by maternal incarceration. It does not include the children whose mothers move repeatedly through incarceration, parole, probation and additional incarceration (Myers et al., 1999). These children represent a high risk group of children in our country (Hagen & Myers, 2003; Myers, Smarsh, Hagen & Kennon, 1999; Johnston, 1995). They are at risk not only because of their mother's incarceration, but because they typically live in poverty, which in itself carries a number of risks (Hagen, et al., 1999; Hagen & Myers, 2003). Travis and Waul (2003) note that,

Understanding the impact of parental Incarceration on children is complicated because these outcomes may be related to any number of conditions- parent-child separation, the crime and arrest that precede

incarceration, or general instability, poverty and inadequate care at home. (p. 15)

Additionally, Johnston and Gable (1995) indicate that 77% of children of incarcerated women had been prenatally exposed to drugs or alcohol. The incidence of young children with developmental delays related to the mothers' use of harmful substances during pregnancy is a reality. Bell and Lau (1995) suggest that, "in the epidemic of alcohol and drug use that has staggered the United States, unborn and young children have been the unseen victims." They go on to state that, "substance abuse constitutes a major threat to our future children" (p. 261).

Lass (2000) indicated that prenatal drug exposure presents itself in a number of observable ways. These include events in the first weeks after birth such as prolonged hospitalization due to prematurity, difficulty feeding, irritability, poor sleep patterns, vomiting and diarrhea, tremors and seizures. Often these infants display poor visual attention and are easily overcome by environmental stimuli. According to Kinnison, Sluder and Cates (1996/1997) the severity of cognitive, social, behavioral and motor deficiencies are compounded by the multiple ingestion of tobacco, alcohol and combined drugs. Singer, Garber and Kliegman (1991) note that drug exposed neonates may have growth, behavioral and neurologic abnormalities that are associated with later developmental problems. They go on to state that,

We believe that maternal cocaine use during pregnancy is a marker variable for early impairments in infant growth and behavioral functioning that have long-term implications for later developmental outcomes, especially for learning disabilities and behavior disorders (Singer et al., p. 206).

Alessandri, Bendersky and Lewis (1998) studied cognitive functioning of drug-exposed infants at 8 and 18 months. They found that as mental demands became greater, the drug exposed infants were less capable of responding to the demands of the cognitive assessment. This suggest that while some of the newborns may not exhibit early delays, as the children get older and the demands become greater, they are less capable of functioning at expected levels. In a 1998 study of Head Start children, Sinclair (1998) found that prenatal drug exposure contributed to a higher incidence of emotional and behavioral problems, which in turn is related to subsequent special education placement in kindergarten. Greenberg (1999-2000) suggested that, "These children are at risk because of secondary factors including physical abuse, neglect, dangerous environments and inadequate caretaking" (p. 87). Inadequate caretaking usually occurs because of the mother's drug abuse and absence due to incarceration. Incarceration of the mother is perhaps the most detrimental secondary social factor.

Children of incarcerated mothers suffer disproportionate disruptions in their lives. When their mothers go to prison, the children are often the unseen victims of their mother's crime. First there is the negative and often traumatic impact of parent-child separation and crisis at the arrest. Park and Clark-Stewart (2002) indicate that children suffer both short term and long term effects because of maternal separation due to incarceration. The short term effects occur at the time of the mother's arrest. At this point in the crisis, according to Johnston (1991), one in five children are present when the mother is arrested, and witness her being taken away. Over half of these children are under the age of seven and were in the sole care of their mothers. Children

present at the time of the mother's arrest report experiencing flashbacks to the incident and suffering nightmares (Kampfner, 1995). When children witness a mother's arrest they are often terrified, bewildered, and shocked. Older children, in school at the time of the mother's arrest may come home to an empty house unaware of what has happened (Fishman, 1983; Myers, et al., 1999; Park & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). The second short term effect (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002) children suffer as a result of maternal arrest and incarceration is referred to as the "conspiracy of silence" (Kampfner, 1995, p. 93) or "forced silence" (Johnston, 1995, p. 73). This adversely affects the psyche of the children. Some families choose not to tell their children the truth about a mother's absence. They choose instead to tell the children that the mother is in the hospital, away at college, or working out of town (Hagen & Myers, 2003). Hagen and Myers note that this forced secrecy causes children to feel confused and abandoned. It adds to the trauma experienced because the children indicate that they have no one to talk to about their mother's incarceration.

Johnson and Gable (1995) note that the pain these children experience because of forced separation from their mothers is often ignored because it is assumed that the mother could not be a good parent if she ended up in prison. Kampfner (1995) indicates:

Children suffer deeply when their mother is taken from them and imprisoned. The vast majority of these women were primary caregivers for their children. These children spent the majority of their time with their mothers, and looked first to their mothers, and looked first to their mothers for support, even when the women were still dependent on their own mothers (p. 89).

Children also suffer from long-term effects of a mother's incarceration (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). McGowan and Bluementhal (1978) note that children suffer in a number of ways:

All children of women prisoners suffer enforced separation from their mothers. Such separation involves a high risk of harm for children and the extent to which a child is effected by separation is determined by such factors as age, personality, nature of the mother-child relationship, cause and duration of the separation, and subsequent continuity of care (p. 63).

Bowlby (1988) indicated that considerable damage is done to the child by a mother's absence, the amount of damage varying with the age of the child when the separation occurred, the length of the absence, the needs of the child, and the quality of the substitute care that is provided. Myers et al. (1999) indicate that children suffer when they are separated from their mothers and the specific "impact" is related to the child's stage of development.

Infants and toddlers (0-2 years) suffer attachment problems when they are separated from their mothers or when they move in and out of their mother's care (Johnston, 1995; Myers et al., 1995; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). In light of this fact it is important to note that small percentages (6%) of women are pregnant when first incarcerated (U.S. Department of Justice, 1994). Few state or federal prisons in the United States allow mothers to keep their infants with them (Gable & Girard, 1995; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Mothers have one or two days contact while they are hospitalized and must then give up their infants and return to prison (Myers et al.). Johnston (1998) indicated that, "Pregnant women in Chicago prisons spend their labor handcuffed to a hospital bed and must part with their newborns 48 hours after birth to

return to jail and leave their infants in the care of a public agency” (p. 1). This prevents mothers and infants from developing an emotional bond and forming an attachment. This is an essential developmental task for both mothers and infants. When mothers and their infants miss out on forming this emotional bond and the child does not form an appropriate attachment, the result can be emotional and behavioral problems in the children (Jacobson & Frye, 1991; Lyons-Ruth, Alpern & Repacholi, 1993; Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, & Kennon, 1999; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002).

It is documented that 2 to 6-year- old children are the most profoundly affected by separation from their mothers (Myers et al., 1999; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Johnston (1995) notes that these children are most likely to be present at the time of the mother’s crime and arrest. Witnessing this traumatic event becomes a source of stress for young children (Lewis, 1992; Kochanska, DeVet, Goldman, Murray & Putnam, 1994; Kochanska, Casey & Fukumoto, 1995). The mother’s incarceration at this point in the child’s development also adversely affects the child-parent attachment bond. Parke and Clarke-Stewart suggest that insecure attachments have been linked to poor peer relationships and diminished cognitive abilities. Baunach (1985) indicated that 70% of young children with incarcerated mothers had emotional or psychological problems. Children at this age exhibit both internalizing and externalizing behaviors such as anxiety, depression, withdrawal, anger, aggression and hostility toward siblings and caregivers. These children also display somatic problems such as eating disorders (Johnston, 1995; Kampfner, 1995; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002).

At this age, children may also regress to less mature behavior as a result of the separation from their mothers. Johnston et al. (1995) indicated that these children may be slow to develop autonomy and independence at a point in their development when they should be developing a confident self-concept. They go on to indicate that, “Children at this age do not recognize their parents as a completely separate individual; they tend to experience injuries or threats to the parent as injuries or threats to themselves” (p. 73). Some young children also suffer from survivor guilt. They tend to believe that all events center on them and that their own misbehavior caused their mother’s incarceration (Myers et al., 1999).

Children between the ages of 7 to 10-years-old are most likely to have previous experience with maternal crime, arrest, and incarceration. At this stage in early development children are becoming increasingly independent and more socially aware (Johnston et al., 1995; Myers, 2002). Separation from the mother is a source of emotional injury to the child. They feel a sense of loss and loneliness as a result of the mother’s absence. Typically, at this age because the children have previously experienced separation from their mothers, such events have profound emotional and developmental effects (Johnston, 1995). Due to multiple incidence of arrest/incarceration these children may also experience multiple living arrangements, which is a source of traumatic stress. Children at this middle childhood level also lose a significant role model. Even though peers are becoming more important in the lives of these children, parents/mothers continue to serve as their children’s models in gender roles and productive behavior (Myers et al., 1999).

In early adolescence (11 to 14-years old) and older adolescence (15-18-years old) children of incarcerated mothers also experience the ill effects of multiple separations due to multiple arrests/incarceration. In addition, children at this age sometimes assume the parental role. This occurs most often when the mother is drug addicted and neglectful. These children also tend to reject limits placed on their behavior by parents and other adults in parental roles. They suffer from what is termed “enduring trauma,” or those stressors that go beyond the actual incarceration (Johnston, 1995; Myers et al., 1999; Travis & Waul, 2003). Enduring trauma results from an accumulation of years of poverty, abuse, neglect, molestation, community violence, grief, parent-child separation, multiple placements and changes in caregivers (Johnston, 1995). Other effects of repeated trauma include anger, aggression, nightmares, hostility toward caregiver, sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, gang activity, lying and stealing and emotional problems (Myers et al., 1999). In some children these responses to enduring trauma are so severe that they are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (Kampfner, 1995).

### **Effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Kampfner (1995) did a two-part study on children of incarcerated mothers. She noted that because children of incarcerated mothers suffer from a combination of the severing of the mother and child bond, a “conspiracy of silence” about the incarceration, and other traumatic situations, including repeated exposure to maternal arrest and incarceration, they are more prone to acute traumatic stress reaction (post-traumatic stress disorder). In the first part of her study she compared a matched group



of 36 children of incarcerated mothers with children from the same high-risk background whose mothers were not incarcerated. In the second part of her study, she observed 50 children of incarcerated mothers during visits with their mothers at the prisons.

Observations were done over a six month period, caretakers were interviewed about the behavior of the children in the home, mothers were interviewed about their children and a small number of children were interviewed. One of her goals was to identify the range of psychological and educational difficulties experienced by children of incarcerated mothers. The results of her study indicated that there is a significant difference between children of incarcerated women and children of women with similar backgrounds whose mothers remained in the home. First she found that even two to three years after their mothers' arrests, these children were able to vividly remember their mother's arrest and their experiences in the courtroom. They felt that they had little emotional supports and they could not identify anyone who could be a possible source of support. Additionally, these children felt they had no one with whom they could talk about their mothers.

Nearly 75% of the children reported experiencing symptoms of depression, difficulty sleeping, problems with concentration, and flashbacks about their mothers' crimes or arrests. Poor school performance was a common problem among the children. The children reported difficulty in concentrating, daydreaming about their mothers and a lack of motivation as their main difficulty. The majority of caregivers reported similar symptoms among the children.

Young and Smith (2000) note that some of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder include impaired memory and concentration, sleep disturbance and withdrawal. These children are also more likely to experience problems with eating and are at greater risk for poor academic performance, alcohol and drug abuse and poor self-esteem. Myers et al. (1999) indicate that children of incarcerated mothers were more likely than their peers to experience suspension, failing grades and extensive absences from school. They note that the dropout rate for prisoners' children was 34%, as compared to a 10% rate for their peers. In a 1996 study, Sack et al. (1997) found that seventy percent of 166 children of incarcerated mothers demonstrated poor academic performance. Sacks et al. (1976) found that over 50% of children of incarcerated parents studied had poor grades or problems with aggression. Additionally, in a later study Sacks et al. (1987) found that 16% of children 6-8 years old displayed transient school phobias and were unwilling to go to school for a 4-6 week period after the incarceration of the parent.

When children experience enduring trauma it also interferes with the process of learning to control emotions. In addition to the effects of post traumatic stress, the social stigma of having a parent incarcerated helps to exacerbate the psychological, emotional, behavioral and academic difficulties these children experience. They are often teased at school and also feel the stigma in their neighborhood, among their peers and from their teachers and family members (Wright & Seymour, 2000). The fear of social stigma often influences caregivers to ask the children of incarcerated mothers to keep this situation secret due to fears about community scorn or rejection. These

children experience social isolation from their peers and adolescents may gravitate to other high risk peers (Myers, et al., 1999).

Children of incarcerated mothers are more likely to engage in lawbreaking activities and six times more likely than their peers to be incarcerated themselves (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Child welfare experts often blame the delinquency of children of incarcerated mothers on “the system.” Englebert (2001) notes that, the system forgets that when they take a child away from it’s mother, they are placed in an under-funded state program. The children are not going to ideal situations and they are not receiving help. James R. Miliken, presiding judge of the juvenile court of San Diego County indicates that, “foster care can be worse for a child than staying with a drug-addicted mother, and in addition, more than three years in the foster system leads to permanent psychological damage for any child” (Sullum, 1999).

The problems surrounding visitation with the mother also helps add to the stress these children experience. Most times when mothers are incarcerated, they are placed in facilities so far away from their place of residence or their child’s residence, that visitations are significantly limited or just do not occur (Young & Smith, 2000). Children need to visit with their mothers as soon as possible after the incarceration. Regular and frequent visits allow the children to express their emotional reaction to the separation and view their mother’s living situation. However, if the facility is more than 100 miles away from the child’s place of residence, they are less likely to visit (Fuller, 1993; Myers et al., 1999). Over 60% of children live more than 100 miles from their mother’s place of incarceration (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993).

## **Summary**

The purpose of Chapter II was to provide an overview of the literature relevant to understanding how children suffer on many levels when separated from their mothers due to incarceration. This review of the literature is also important because it highlights the issue of increased incarceration of women in our society and the disparate number of African American women caught up in a punitive judicial system and a war on drugs. The majority of these women are mothers to children under the age of 18.

Children with an incarcerated mother represent a very high risk group of children in our society. These children are at risk not only because of their mother's incarceration but because they typically live in poverty, may have inadequate care at home and may experience general instability in their lives, including exposure to drugs and violence. When mothers go to prison children become the unseen victims of their mothers' crimes and suffer considerable difficulties because of the separation from their mothers.

Children at all ages suffer some form of social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulty as a result of the separation from their mothers. Infants and toddlers may suffer attachment problems. Older children may exhibit psychological difficulties. Adolescents experience the loss of their mother as a source of emotional injury and feel a sense of loss and loneliness as a result of the mother's absence.

Some children suffer from enduring trauma as a result of an accumulation of years of poverty, abuse neglect, community violence and parent-child separation. Some children may also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and experience difficulties with impaired memory, eating problems, sleep disturbance and withdrawal.

Child outcomes for children separated from a mother due to incarceration are not positive. The literature reports a wide range of difficulties in this population of children including social, emotional, behavioral and educational problems.

**Chapter III**  
**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**  
**Introduction**

The focus of this qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding the impact of their incarceration on the social, emotional, behavioral and educational functioning of their children. A qualitative design was utilized in order to obtain a greater understanding of the lives of incarcerated mothers and the impact it has on their children. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggest that qualitative researchers seek to understand the meaning of their participants' lives. Merriam (2001) notes that qualitative researchers try to better understand human experiences and how the participants understand their world. Henriques (1982) suggests that "perceptions help determine identification of the problem, attempt to remedy the problem and to determine the resources employed in the problem solution. Perceptions help to validate viewpoints" (p.33). McGowan and Blumenthal (1978) indicate that, "parents often feel their children's hurt as keenly as their own. Thus, one way to learn what the imprisonment of mother's means to children is to ask the mothers" (p.49). Qualitative research such as this places its emphasis on

people's lived experiences and the meanings people place on events in their lives as well as their perceptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This study also attempted to give a "critical voice" to the plight and hardships of incarcerated women and their children. Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) indicate that critical inquiry can be best understood in terms of empowering the individual. Critical inquiry also attempts to confront an injustice by doing more than just increasing knowledge. Therefore, this study will attempt to give voice to this population of women and their children in order to empower them in their struggle not to be separated because of incarceration.

Through in-depth interviewing with these women the researcher attempted to acquire knowledge and construct knowledge regarding a significant issue in our society, from the mother's perspective, through a critical race theory lens. Critical race theory is a framework generated by scholars of color who study law and legal policies and who are concerned about racial subjugation in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theorists also expound the belief that persons in power designed laws and policies that were suppose to be race-neutral but still perpetuate racial and ethnic oppression. The critical race lens is essential because the majority of incarcerated mothers are African American women. Critical inquiry presents an understanding of how the intersection of race and gender influence the increased prosecution of women of color. Critical race theorists believe that by imposing criminal sanctions against poor Black women, the government perpetuates the historical devaluation of Black women as mothers (Roberts, 1995). According to Delgado (1995), people of color speak from an

experience framed by racism and their stories come from a different frame of reference. Therefore their perspective gives them a voice that is different from the dominant culture and deserves to be heard. Critical race theory came about in the late 1970's as a response to perceptions that the civil rights coalition of the 1960's and early 1970's had stalled and that new strategies were needed to deal with subtle forms of racism and a judiciary that no longer seemed eager to champion civil rights.

Barnes (1992) speaks to the issue of the disparate impact of legislative penalties between the possessions of powder cocaine versus crack-cocaine. According to federal drug trafficking penalties, both powder cocaine and crack cocaine are listed as Schedule II drugs. However, a smaller amount of crack (5-49 gms) than powder cocaine (500-4999 gms), could result in a sentence of not less than 5 years and not more than 40 years (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). Barnes (1992) notes a Minnesota statute that calls for 48 months incarceration for crack possession versus 12 months incarceration for powder cocaine possession. More importantly, 96.69% of those charged with crack possession were Black, while 79.6% charged with cocaine possession were white (Barnes, 1992). The Human Rights Watch Briefing report (2002) indicates that Blacks are prosecuted in federal courts more frequently than whites for crack versus powder cocaine. As a result Blacks have felt the effects of the longer sentences for crack. It stands to reason from a critical perspective, that more African American women will be affected by this form of legislative and judicial diversity and more African American children will be adversely affected by the separation from their mothers, due to incarceration.



The primary purpose of this study was to understand how mother and child separation due to incarceration may affect the social, emotional, behavioral and educational functioning of the children. In addition to this primary purpose, this chapter presents my perspective as the researcher in this study, the research questions, research design, participants, and a description of the procedures that will be used to obtain interview data from previously incarcerated mothers, data analysis and assumptions of the study.

### **Perspective of the Researcher**

Research is often conducted because the researcher has some personal interest in the topic being studied. In the case of this research, my interest was fueled as a result of previous studies I had completed on the so called “Crack Children” coming into the public schools. Those children were labeled problematic because of prenatal drug exposure, but more in-depth studies made note of other factors just as damaging or more so, than the drug exposure. One of the factors was separation from the mother due to incarceration.

As an African American woman, I believe a critical perspective was essential in order to fully understand the total dynamics at play in this dilemma of increased incarceration of women and the adverse impact it has on their children. The critical lens allowed the cultural viewpoint of these women to be heard along with their perspectives on the damage to their children. I believe that in America, race and gender play a significant role in many aspects of our society. The manner in which justice is dispensed in America, even in this 21st Century, is influenced by race and at times,

gender. The majority of women affected by this increased incarceration are poor and Black and I would be amiss, as the tool of this research study, if I did not include this perspective of how race and power dominate our society.

The critical race approach was also used as a way to highlight the fact that the increased incarceration of African American women has a ripple effect throughout society, beginning with the adverse impact on their children. The stigma attached to a Black woman's incarceration often leads to feelings of disgust from others in our society and often these feeling are also directed at the children. The children suffer because of the manner in which justice is dispensed to their mothers. I agree with Justice Harry Blackman's view that we must take account of race if we are ever to get beyond racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2000). My desire was that this research study would lead to additional studies that address that needs of this special population of children who so desperately need advocates in their lives. Some of the children are now reaching an age of maturity and are speaking out about their suffering as young children.

I once heard that with each voice speaking up on an issue of importance a slow crescendo begins to build until that crescendo rises to a point of upsurge. If there is an upsurge loud enough by those of us concerned about these children, we can help avoid the possible destruction of a generation of innocent children.

### **Research Questions**

This investigation will address the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding their incarceration and any social, emotional, behavioral and/or

educational difficulties their children experienced during the separation from their mothers?

2. What are the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding their incarceration and any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children experienced after reunification with their mothers?
3. What are mother's perceptions regarding the types of interventions that could have been beneficial to their children in experiencing less social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties?

### **Pilot Study**

The impetus for this present research study arose from a case study I conducted that documented one mother's perceptions about how her substance abuse and subsequent incarceration affected the lives of her three young daughters. In addition, this young woman was also the product of a substance abusing, incarcerated mother. Originally my interest was in documenting how prenatal substance abuse caused the so-called "crack baby myth." During the course of that research, the importance of other factors, especially the mother's incarceration were consistently documented and brought to light, as well as issues of race and economic status.

The design of the original case study was somewhat different from the design of the current study. The case study was designed as an instrumental case study to shed light on the issue of the disproportionate rate of incarceration of African American women by telling the story of one woman. Stakes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002) suggest that

case studies are done as a form of qualitative research because of an interest in the individual case. He defines a case study as both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry. Stakes asserts, "If we are moved to study it, the case is almost certainly going to be a functioning specific," (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p.436) or what is referred to as a bounded system. Therefore in this case study the unit of analysis or bounded system was the one individual mother.

The results of that case study revealed a rich description of the life of the participant and her daughters. One theme centered on the generational affect of substance abuse and incarceration. The participant's mother abused alcohol and other drugs, was incarcerated and relied on her mother to raise the participant. The participant abused illicit drugs, was incarcerated and relied on family members to raise her daughters. As a young girl she had severe behavior problems in school and was placed into a program outside of the public school to address her severe emotional and behavioral difficulties. She also had learning disabilities and required individual instruction to address academic delays. The daughters of the participant likewise, had behavioral and educational difficulties. At the time of the study the participant's oldest daughter, age 17, and in the 11th grade was three months pregnant. The 15 year old daughter was diagnosed with a specific learning disability and also had emotional concerns. The 13 year old daughter also had learning difficulties.

The participant provided a rich case history of not only how her life was negatively affected because of her mother's substance abuse and incarceration, but also how she then allowed the same things to occur in the lives of her three daughters. This

case history encouraged me to study more women to document how substance abuse and subsequent incarceration impacts the lives of generations of children and mothers.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative researchers rely on interviewing techniques as one means of obtaining vital information. This modern social science research model sees knowledge as given (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). The participants of this study gave their personal testimonies during the interview process. Holstein and Gubrium (1997) suggest that researchers treat interviews as their window to the world. Interviewing is considered a useful way to obtain large amounts of information. According to Kahn and Cannell, (1957) interviewing can be viewed as “a conversation with a purpose” (p.149). Marshall and Rossman (1989) note that, “qualitative in-depth interviews are much more like conversations than formal, structured interviews” (p.82). Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) point out that the purpose of an interview is to understand the perspective of the interviewee. Holstein and Gubrium (1997) indicate that interviewing provides a method of acquiring empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives. By employing this type of dialogue the researcher hopes to establish a non-threatening environment that will encourage participation by the interviewee.

The interviewing method involves personal interaction and therefore cooperation is essential. In order to obtain the information that is needed the interviewer must interact in such a way that the interviewee will be willing to share information and be completely truthful. It is the responsibility of the researcher to make sure the interview is conducted in such a way that the interviewee’s perspective

on the social phenomenon is captured (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). The researcher is an active player in the development of data and of meaning in an in-depth interview (Legard, et al., 2003). Miller and Glassner (1997) indicate that information about social worlds can be obtained through in-depth interviewing. They go on to suggest that researchers who strive to understand and document others' understandings choose qualitative interviewing. During in-depth interviewing mothers can convey their knowledge about the difficulties their children face. This is their social world and most are very articulate at conveying what is happening in the lives of their children, or what has happened. Miller and Glassner (1997) suggest that researchers can not provide a mirror reflection of the social world but they can provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds.

Obtaining mothers' perspectives was important because it can result in a deeper conceptualization and understanding of their perceptions of how their incarcerations affected the well-being of their children. Using in-depth interviewing allowed the mothers the opportunity to express their own feelings, beliefs and experiences while documenting their child's range of suffering. The rapport established during an in-depth interview required that the interviewee feel comfortable enough to talk back and respond to questions asked. Miller and Glassner (1997) note, "When respondents talk back they provide insights into the narratives they use to describe the meanings of their social worlds and into their experience of the worlds of which they are a part" (p. 106). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggest that a good interview requires deep listening to what

the participant has to say. This allows for a richer understanding of the participants and their experiences.

Therefore this qualitative study employed the use of individual in-depth interviews, along with field notes and observation/participation by the researcher in support group sessions with some of the women. This allowed the mothers to develop trust with the researcher and to have the interview conversation as a pipeline for transmitting knowledge about their children.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study are five African American mothers who were current or past participants in a women's re-entry support group. The support group met for one hour, once a week, on an on-going basis and was designed to provide a source of support for women returning to the community after incarceration. The researcher was given permission by the re-entry program director to be an observer, and at times, a participant during some sessions with the women. During the sessions I attended I explained my research to the group of women in attendance and invite anyone interested in participating to either meet with me after the support group meeting or to contact me by phone. The women were provided with a phone number to call to leave their contact information if they were interested in participating in the study.

I was able to meet some women who were willing to discuss and describe their experiences of arrest and incarceration and how they perceived that experience affected the social, emotional, behavioral and educational functioning of their children.

For this study, the eligibility criteria included the following: (a) being an African American mother to a child 18 years of age or younger at the time of incarceration and reunification, (b) being incarcerated for at least one year, (c) having lived with her child and/or children prior to and after incarceration, and (d) had some contact with her child and/or children during her term of confinement (See Appendix B).

### **Procedures and Data Collection**

Prior to conducting any face-to-face interviews with participants, telephone contact was made in order to give the participants an in-depth understanding of the background and purpose of the research being conducted. Upon meeting individually and separately with each woman at a predetermined location, a copy of the Informed Consent form (See Appendix A) was given and explained in order to provide the participant with additional background information on the study and to obtain informed consent. Each participant also received a copy of the interview questions to review prior to beginning the interview. A set of predetermined questions were asked of each participant (See Appendix C). However, the researcher was flexible enough to follow the participant's lead when necessary during the interview and ask follow-up questions and probe for further data. The women who participated in the interview process were each assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. Any mention of a child's name during the interview was deleted in order to protect their identity.

Each participant's interview was tape recorded. Recording each interview helped maintain the integrity of the responses and provided rich data. Bogdan and Biklen



(1998) suggest that data that is thick with description reveals the participants' perspective.

An additional aspect of the study was to observe some of the women during their support group meetings at the re-entry program. During these meetings I would take notes in a small spiral notebook on the topic being discussed for the day and some of the women's perspectives on those topics. These notes were filed and later used to enhance the study and give previously incarcerated women in general a voice regarding their struggles as well as the previously incarcerated mothers. Pseudonyms were assigned for any women mentioned in regards to the support group in order to protect her identity and to make the women feel more comfortable about participating.

My observer/participant role in these support groups allowed an opportunity to establish rapport and trust with the women who were involved in individual interviews. These meetings provided me with an invaluable experience in regard to getting to know the women on their own terms. The women were very accepting of my presence in their meetings and appeared comfortable discussing their issues while I was there.

The primary purpose of this research was to obtain mothers' perspectives on how their incarceration affected the well-being of their children. Therefore, recording accurate information was essential. The tapes and notes were kept in a secure location after each interview session until they were transcribed and the data analyzed. After transcription and analysis of the data the notes and individual tapes were destroyed.

## **Analysis of Data**

Data analysis is viewed as a challenging and exciting stage of the qualitative research process. This process is continuous and often repetitive (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Data may also be treated as representing phenomena in terms of such things as feelings, experiences, events, or perceptions, as in this study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Data gathered from an interview provides a rich description along with a complex collection of information from the participant. Merriam (2001) notes that analyzing data involves making sense out of the data. It reduces, consolidates and interprets what participants report throughout the interview process. Because the questions for the mothers' interviews are very specific to the topic of the study, themes are built into the questions which were used to organize the data.

Each participant's recorded interview was listened to and transcribed in order to analyze thoroughly. Categories were organized based on the three research questions examining social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties in the children while the mother was incarcerated, examining mother's perspectives of any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children experienced upon reunification and exploring mother's perspectives of what types of intervention/assistance may have been beneficial.

Responses of participants were then analyzed to determine how they related to these categories. Other categories were also unveiled as part of the content analysis process that are important in regard to the general body of research on this topic regarding the children. Notes kept from observations of the women's support group

meetings were also important to the study. The notes were reviewed and analyzed to ascertain relevant topics discussed that could be used to highlight the profile of the incarcerated woman and the issues the women face.

### **Assumptions**

For this study, several assumptions were made. First it was assumed that most of the mothers in the study would report some type of drug involvement that contributed to or was a part of their reasons for incarceration. Secondly, it was assumed that the mothers would report that they perceived their children experienced some type of social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties as a result of separation due to their incarceration. It was also assumed that the mothers would report that some type of intervention/assistance for their children is important to them experiencing less social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties.

### **Issues of Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative research needs to address issues of reliability and validity just as with other empirical research. Lincoln and Guba (1981) address the terms of audit ability, credibility, and fittingness in qualitative studies for corresponding terms of reliability, internal validity and external validity.

Audit ability (reliability) was addressed in this study by following the procedures explained in contacting each participant, making sure that each participant received identical written information, and conducting each interview by asking each mother the same set of questions. Through following the procedures I have outlined in this chapter, it is possible that another researcher could reach similar conclusions regarding mother's perceptions on the adverse impact on a child when separated from the mother due to incarceration.

Credibility was achieved through engagement on my part in weekly support group sessions, at least once a month, over a seven month period, held at a reentry program. Credibility helps to establish that results are believable and provide an understanding of the phenomena from the eyes of the participant. During this time observations of the women and interactions with the women provided me with a greater understanding of their feelings about their children as previously incarcerated mothers, as well as other life issues and strengthened the credibility of the study. I also used the following forms of triangulation: observation and interaction with the previously incarceration mothers during support group sessions, the documentation of multiple sources of information through a comprehensive literature review, and the recording of field notes.

The third concept of fittingness or external validity according to Lincoln and Guba (1981) refers to the generalizability of the study. By doing a thorough job of studying the participants, spending time with them in an effort to obtain accurate knowledge about them and conducting in-depth interviews, along with the documented literature review, it can be generalized that children do suffer when they experience enforced separation from their mother due to incarceration.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

The focus of this qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding the impact of their incarceration on the social, emotional, behavioral and educational functioning of their children under the age of 18. The continued growth in the numbers of incarcerated mothers presents a serious threat to the well-being of their children. The Child Welfare League of America (1998) has documented a link between maternal incarceration and social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties in the children of these women. Johnston (1995), and Myers et al (1999) also suggest that children of incarcerated mothers may experience social, emotional, and psychological difficulties.

A qualitative design utilizing individual interviews was used in order to obtain a greater understanding of the impact separation due to incarceration has on the lives of the children of women inmates. The data consist of five individual interviews with previously incarcerated African American mothers as well as antidotal information from

topics discussed in the women's re-entry program support group sessions recorded in field notes, which was used to triangulate the data.

Thirty years ago McGowan and Blumenthal (1978) documented the adverse effect of maternal incarceration on the lives of the children left behind. Others such as Johnston (1995) and Myers et al (1999) have also indicated that all children of incarcerated mothers suffer deeply as a result of the enforced separation. While the nature and extent of that suffering are somewhat influenced by other factors such as the age of the child, the adverse impact is nonetheless felt by all (Johnston, 1995; Myers et al., 1999). This research was designed to explore this serious issue by obtaining the mother's perspectives of how they believed their children suffered as a result of their incarceration. Therefore this study serves as an important addition to the limited investigations into this topic.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding their incarceration and any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children experienced during the separation from their mothers?
2. What are the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding their incarceration and any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children experienced after reunification with their mothers?

3. What are mothers' perceptions regarding the types of interventions that could have been beneficial to their children in experiencing less social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties?

This chapter provides my findings of the data in the study in four sections. The first section gives a description of the five mothers participating in the study. The second section provides a report of the social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties the mothers perceived their children experienced while they were incarcerated and those difficulties their children continued to experience upon their reunification. The third section supplies a description of the types of assistance the mothers perceived would have been the most beneficial in helping their children with any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties they experienced as a result of the separation due to incarceration. The final section of this chapter provides the reader with information surrounding additional issues of child visitation with the mother during incarceration, secrecy about the whereabouts of the mother, and child care arrangements for the children left behind. These additional issues highlight factors beyond the mother's incarceration that also have an adverse impact on the children due to the mother's incarceration.

### **Description of Mothers in the Study**

The participants for this research consisted of five African American mothers who all chose to participate in this research with the hopes that the information gathered could in some way help their children, themselves and other women and children who suffered the consequences of forced separation due to incarceration.



Pseudo names chosen for the five participants were Anna, Beverly, Carmen, Darla, and Earlene.

Anna, age 36, was the first mother interviewed. She was incarcerated because of substance abuse involving her position as a nurse. She sustained back injuries in a car accident and abused pain medication to the point of taking a patient's medication. Anna indicated, "I was taking the patient's meds and I got caught. I had been doing it for almost a year. I was really out of control." Anna served a little more than one year in a state women's prison in Ohio. She was the married mother of two children. Anna's children were a 14 year old daughter and a 10 year old son at the time of her incarceration. Both children were cared for in her home by her husband and her mother. Anna continues to live with her husband, mother, and her two children now ages 16 and 12. She had been successfully involved in the reentry process for approximately ten months since her release. Anna is presently in the process of securing gainful employment with the assistance of her mother and her mother's employer. She and her children continue to receive support and assistance from her church. She credits her family and her faith with keeping her grounded through her incarceration and reentry.

Beverly, age 30 at the time of her interview, was incarcerated on two separate occasions beginning at age twenty. Beverly indicated, "The first time was for possession and trafficking and I got out on probation after I did three years." At that time her twin sons were almost four years old. Her second incarceration occurred a little over three years later for aggravated assault, as the result of drug involvement. Beverly reported,

“One day we were all sitting around getting high and this other female that was there became angry at me and we got into a fight and I cut her up pretty bad.” Beverly served 15 months at an Ohio women’s prison facility. Her sons were cared for by her mother and extended family each time she was incarcerated. Upon her second release, Beverly returned to live with her mother, sister, brother, her aunt and her twin sons, who are 11 years old. She continues to receive support from extended family members and her mother. Beverly was not involved with the father of her sons during her participation in this study. Beverly had been an active participant in the reentry process for approximately one year since her release from prison.

Carmen served 14 months at a state facility for women at age 21 for theft. She reported, “I would steal stuff and sell it to get money. I supported myself and my habit like that for about two years before I got caught.” She was the single mother of a three year old daughter at the time of her incarceration. Carmen lived with her grandmother prior to her incarceration and when she returned home. She depended on her grandmother for emotional and financial support. Carmen’s own mother was incarcerated during the time Carmen was incarcerated. Carmen reported, “My grandmother took care of my daughter. She’s all I have and all my daughter has because my mom is in prison now.” Carmen was actively involved in her own rehabilitation and the education of her daughter. Carmen’s six year old daughter had some special educational needs. Carmen’s recent involvement in the reentry program is helping her acquire knowledge to assist in her daughter’s education. Carmen’s mother remains incarcerated and Carmen continues to live with her grandmother and daughter.

Darla was incarcerated on three different occasions. The first two incarcerations were for periods of less than one year. She served that time in local jail facilities. The third incarceration was for Grand Theft and carried a sentence of five to ten years. Darla reported, "I was down there for Grand Theft and I had a drug thing. I had some pills on me. When I first went there I had five to ten years on me." Darla served four years in a women's facility in Ohio. Darla was the widowed mother of two children at the time of her incarceration, a 12- year old daughter and a 13- year old son. Darla's children were cared for by her mother, brothers and sister during her incarceration. Upon her release from prison she returned to live with her family. Darla has successfully completed her reentry process and has begun to turn her life around. She is enrolled in a local university and plans to pursue her degree in religious studies. Her goal is to minister to both previously incarcerated women and incarcerated women. Darla's children are now young adults living on their own. She continues to encourage them to seek professional help with any difficulties they have.

Earlene was incarcerated for the murder of her husband. She indicated that the incident involved a fight over illegal drugs. "The circumstances about my incarceration was drug abuse, homelessness, and ah, the murder of, the reason I was incarcerated was because of the incidence of a murder charge of my children's father. We got into a fight over drugs."

Earlene was the mother of three children ages 11, 8, and 7-years-old at the time of her arrest and incarceration. In addition to the time Earlene served in the state women's facility, she also spent several months at a halfway house before she was

reunited with her three young children. Earlene is drug free and living a new life with her children. She has moved to a new city and is gainfully employed.

The most recent data indicates that one of the major reasons for the overall increase in the United States prison population is the continuous growth in female arrests due to drug involvement (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). The participants in this study appear to fit the profile of typical female prisoners in America who list drug abuse and involvement as a major factor in her arrest and incarceration (Roberts, 1995; Englebert, 2001). Due to this problem of drug abuse and involvement with women the number of incarcerated women continues to increase at approximately a 10% annual rate (Mumola, 2000), and this has been the standard since the crack problem began in the 1980's (Roberts, 1995). Critical race theorists suggest that this prosecution of poor drug-addicted/drug-involved Black mothers is the result of an inseparable combination of gender, economic status and race (Roberts, 1995).

Poor African-American women are suffering in record numbers as a result of a judicial system that depends on mass incarceration as a means to address our society's problem with drugs (Richie, 2002). Critical race theorists also suggest that this is another way to devalue the Black woman as a mother. This devaluation of the Black woman has its roots in slavery, when black mothers were taken from their children to take care of the children of the slave masters (Roberts, 1995). Richie (2002) goes further to note that one of the most vivid examples of racial disparity in our society is the racial/ethnic profile of women in prison and jails.

Table 1 summarizes some demographic data on the five African-American participants in this study. These general demographics reflect information at the time of the mothers' last incarcerations.

Table 1.

General Demographics of the Mothers

Name	Reason for incarceration	Term of sentence	Times in prison	Age	Number of children	Age of children
Anna	Drug Abuse	1 year	1	36	2	14 & 10
Beverly	Aggravated Assault	15 months	2	27	2	7
Carmen	Theft	14 months	1	21	1	3
Darla	Grand Theft	4 years	3	34	2	12 & 13
Earlene	Murder	2 years	1	30	3	11, 8 & 7

**Summary of Mothers' Demographics**

The five participants in this research study all reported a lifestyle that consisted of some type of drug involvement that either contributed to their incarceration or was the direct cause of it. The participants served time for offenses involving aggravated assault, grand theft, murder and drug abuse. As Table 1 show they served sentences ranging from one year to as long as four years. Beverly served one previous sentence. Darla, having served two previous confinements, served the longest sentence. Anna, Carmen, and Earlene were all incarcerated only once.

### **Mother's Perceptions of Children's Difficulties during Incarceration**

Kampfner (1995) indicated that children suffer greatly when a mother is incarcerated because a vast majority of incarcerated mothers were the primary caregivers for their children prior to their incarceration. The separation and incarceration becomes a source of emotional injury for the children. Children of incarcerated mothers reportedly suffer emotional difficulties such as depression and withdrawal, behavioral difficulties such as anger and aggression, social difficulties such as getting along with classmates and a loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed, and academic difficulties such as attention problems and non-compliance, as a result of the trauma experienced due to the forced separation (Wright & Seymour, 2000).

Each mother who participated in this research study reported her perceptions of the difficulties her child/or children experienced as a result of their separation due to incarceration. The mothers continued to have some form of contact with their child/or children and were therefore able to report known difficulties. The difficulties varied from situation to situation, and from child to child, but each child experienced what the mothers described and perceived to be either social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties.

#### ***Social Difficulties***

Wright and Seymour (2000) suggest that there is a social stigma attached to a mother's incarceration that contributes to the social difficulties the children experience. The mothers interviewed for this research study reported a variety of difficulties they perceived to be social difficulties in their children.

Anna, a former nurse, incarcerated for drug abuse, reported that she believed her teenage daughter experienced social difficulties related to her incarceration because her daughter began to withdraw from social activities with her friends, such as trips to the mall and sleepovers with friends; she would stay at home and not interact with others. She would only participate in church activities. Anna indicated,

When I was incarcerated [my daughter] wouldn't go out, not even if my sister and my niece offered to take her. She wouldn't sleep over at my sister's and she stopped having her friends sleep over. She stayed at home with my mom a lot.

Anna did not describe any social difficulties with her son. She stated, "My son played in a community football and basketball league and he continued to be involved in those activities without any problem. He didn't have any problems with his friends in his sports."

Beverly, who had completed a second incarceration at the time of her interview due to issues around substance abuse that led to an assault on another female, indicated that her sons did not have any social difficulties. She believed this was due to their young age at the time of her first and second incarceration. She reported,

My boys were pretty young the first time I was incarcerated so they didn't have any problems like that, and this last time they didn't have any problems like that. They took karate classes and they liked that and they still do it now and they still play with the same friends and don't have any problems.

Carmen, who herself experienced the adverse impact of maternal incarceration due to her mother's incarcerations, reported what she believed were social difficulties with her daughter as a result of her incarceration. Her daughter fought with the other

children in her Head Start class, and because of her fights, she was no longer allowed to play with one little girl who lived in her neighborhood and also attended the same Head Start center. Carmen stated,

I guess she has some social problems because she would fight with the other children at Head Start. She even slapped another little girl when they were playing at school and after that the little girl's mother wouldn't let her come to my grandmother's house to play with [my daughter] anymore. She had a lot of problems like that, especially getting along with the other children.

Darla, who was separated from her children for more than four years, also reported that both her children exhibited difficulties that she characterized as social difficulties. She noted, "It seemed to me that they were hanging around people a lot like me, especially my son, he was out there in the streets with the dope boys, socializing with the guys out on the streets." Darla also indicated that both children became belligerent with other people and would lash out at others. She added,

I think socially over the time that I was incarcerated, my children became very belligerent and very angry and it would come out because they would lash out. They would cuss people out and do things and they would lash out at me.

Earlene, the mother of three children perceived that all of her children exhibited social difficulties as a result of their separation from her during her incarceration. She reported,

I would say that they did have social problems, I guess you would call them that, yes, I would believe so. They really didn't want to get close to people. I know that. They are just now starting to get out and get to know people and to form relationships with people. They use to think that any people they would get close to would leave them.



### ***Analysis of Social Difficulties***

Social difficulties are a commonly reported problem among children of incarcerated mothers (Johnston, 1995). Meyers et al. (1999) also noted that this population of children often experience social isolation from their peers and adolescents may gravitate to other high risk peers. Wright and Seymour (2000) suggest that there is a social stigma felt by this population of children among their peers, family members and teachers. The mothers interviewed for this study support the findings that indicate social difficulties in this population of children. For seven of the ten children their mothers reportedly perceived some type of social difficulty. Among them, Carmen's daughter, age three at the time of her mother's incarceration, experienced social isolation from a peer in her community.

Younger children between the ages of two and 6-years-old like Carmen's daughter often experience poor peer relationships as an adverse affect of maternal incarceration and separation. Making and keeping friends are common social difficulties in these children (Clark-Stewart, 2002). As an example of this difficulty Carmen's daughter experienced poor peer relationships in her Head Start class and also during kindergarten.

Older children tend to reject limits place on their behavior and have social difficulties such as involvement with gangs and other law breaking activity (Johnston, 1995). This was evident in Darla's son, age 13 at the time of her prison incarceration, who began to associate with a high risk group of peers and engage in criminal activity. At this stage in his early adolescence he had experienced two prior separations from his

mother due to incarcerations. It would be safe to indicate that he most likely experienced the adverse affect of multiple separations from his mother due to incarceration.

### ***Emotional Difficulties***

Children of incarcerated mothers are more likely than their peers to experience emotional difficulties (Young & Smith, 2000). Children at different ages manifest these difficulties in a variety of ways. Infants and toddlers may not develop an emotional bond and form an attachment, causing later emotional difficulties (Myers et al., 1999; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Children between ages 2 to 6 may also suffer poor attachment resulting in such emotional problems as depression, anxiety and withdrawal (Johnston, 1995; Kampfner, 1995). Older children between the ages of seven to ten and eleven to eighteen year olds emotionally feel a sense of loss and loneliness and experience the separation as a source of emotional injury (Johnston, 1995).

Anna perceived that her son and her daughter experienced difficulties she would describe as emotional difficulties. She indicated,

Well, as far as emotional problems are concerned, I think [my daughter] may have been depressed while I was away. My mom said that [she] cried a lot too. She would come home from school and go to bed, get up, eat and go back to bed.

Early adolescents (11 to 14 years old), like Anna's daughter feel a sense of loss and loneliness as a result of the mother's absence (Johnston, 1995). Her daughter appeared to go through a stage of grieving. Her son appeared to have similar difficulties

that came out in the form of somatic complaints at school. No physical reason was found for his stomach aches and headaches. According to Anna,

My son seemed to have problems where he just didn't feel well at school a lot. He would go to the clinic at school and they would call my mother. He complained about stomach aches and headaches. I think it was mostly emotional.

Beverly described her son's thumb sucking and rocking back and forth over long periods of time (an hour or more) as an emotional problem. She reported,

I don't know if you would call this an emotional problem or not but [my son] started sucking his thumb and rocking back and forth. He would sit in a chair and rock himself back and forth while he sucked his thumb. My mother said sometimes he would sit like that and rock for more than an hour.

Carmen described her daughter's anger as an emotional problem that caused her to lash out at others and have behavioral problems. Her daughter fought with the other children in her Head Start class. Carmen reported,

I think the problems she was having with behavior were also some kind of emotional problems too because of me being away from her. They were emotional and behavioral because she was so angry at everybody and at me. I think the emotional part came out in her behavior, so I guess you could call it emotional behavior or something like that. She wasn't like that before I started having problems and went away.

Darla believed that her daughter had emotional problems because she was sexually abused while Darla was incarcerated. Darla indicated,

My daughter had some emotional problems that my son didn't have because she was sexually abused while I was incarcerated. My daughter said she wanted to kill herself and one time had to go to the emergency room because she took some pills.

Earlene suggested that there were emotional difficulties in all three of her children. She believed that they had trust issues with her when they were first reunited. She noted, "They didn't trust me at first when we got back together." She also indicated that her children had difficulty sleeping and often would sleep with her. Additionally, Earlene reported,

My daughter was very emotional. She cried a lot; even after I came home she cried a lot. There were a lot of emotions with my daughter and with my boys also. My son who was being raised by my mother started acting in a very effeminate way. He still behaves that way now that we are back together. He is very emotional. He cries easily and gets very upset easily.

### ***Analysis of Emotional Difficulties***

Children at all ages, like the children in this study, experience emotional difficulties as a result of the separation from their mother due to incarceration (Johnston et al., 1995; Myers, 2002). Baunach (1985) suggests that as many as 70% of young children with an incarcerated mother may experience an emotional difficulty such as those experienced by the children in this research study. All ten of the children discussed by the mothers in this study experienced difficulties that their mothers perceived as an emotional difficulty. The emotional difficulties perceived by the mothers included depression, as suggested in Ann's daughter, suicide ideation, noted in Darla's daughter, somatic complaints, evidenced in Ann's son and withdrawal, demonstrated in Ann's daughter, Beverly's son, and Earlene's three children.

### ***Behavioral Difficulties***

Children exhibit both internalizing and externalizing behavioral difficulties as a result of the separation from their mother (Kampfner, 1995). Externalizing behaviors

were the behaviors most described by the participants in this study when reporting about their children.

Anna indicated that although her son experienced a couple of verbal and physical altercations and on occasion her daughter would get angry and talk back, there were no significant issues that would be considered actual behavior difficulties during her absence. She reported, “My kids never really had any serious fights or anything like that or behavior problems.”

Beverly’s concerns centered on her sons’ fighting, and she reported that her twin boys fought with each other quite a bit. Beverly indicated,

I would think that their fighting might be behavioral. It didn’t really get like that until I went away the second time. I think they fight too much. [My son] likes to tease his brother about sucking his thumb and will even pull the thumb out of his mouth, and then [my other son] will hit him and then the fighting starts. They didn’t fight when they were young. When I came home from my first incarceration, I noticed that the boys would fight sometimes, but it wasn’t like it is now. It got really bad when I was incarcerated the second time.

Carmen described a number of behavioral concerns with her daughter including the fighting with other children she reported under social difficulties. Carmen indicated, “My grandmother would tell me that every day when she would pick [my daughter] up from school there was a note in her folder about behavior problems, like full blown temper tantrums. She definitely had behavior problems.” Carmen’s daughter was also defiant with her Head Start teachers and continued to have behavioral difficulties when she entered kindergarten.

Darla reported behavior difficulties in her two children that are commonly seen in adolescent children of incarcerated mothers. Behavior problems such as hostility toward caregivers, anger and aggression result from the mother child separation due to incarceration (Myers et al., 1999). Darla suggested that the behavior difficulties came out in different ways in both her children. She noted,

Both my kids had behavior problems but it came out in different ways. Mostly their behavior while I was gone was very angry. They became very belligerent and angry. they would cuss at people. My daughter would twist things that I would say to her and become very angry. When she tried to get a little job, she wasn't able to keep it because she would get angry on the job and cuss people out or say things to people and they would have to let her go. I knew that her behavior wasn't right and my son because my family was telling me about their behavior.

Earlene stated that the behavioral difficulties her children experienced were different for each child. She indicated,

Yes, yes, my oldest son became very, very angry while I was away. He could not stand people and he didn't want to be around anyone. He was angry because I wasn't there and because our family was not together. All he wanted was to make sure the house was clean and everything around him was clean and he wanted to make sure the family would get back together and not break up.

Earlene's oldest son was 11-years-old at the time of her incarceration. The literature reports that children at this stage of development (early adolescence) will demonstrate behavioral difficulties in a variety of ways, including sometimes assuming the parental role, displaying anger and aggression and showing hostility toward their caregivers and others as a result of maternal incarceration (Myers et al., 1999). Her oldest son appeared to exhibit a number of these behaviors. He obsessed about

cleaning the house, making sure his sister and brother were all right and about the family reuniting. He also had some difficulties with responding angrily to others.

Concerning her daughter, Earlene suggested that her behaviors were not as severe. Her daughter reportedly, “wanted to be the silly putty” and “clown around.” Her youngest son also had behavior difficulties that could be clinically described as internalizing behaviors, those behaviors that are not as overt. Earlene noted, “My youngest son, he shut down totally. He didn’t want to talk, he didn’t want to share. He’s still very quiet and won’t talk much but he still needs to get some things out.”

### ***Analysis of Behavioral Difficulties***

Behavioral difficulties in children with an incarcerated mother manifest in a variety of ways such as externalizing behaviors which are more overt and obvious, aggressive and angry behaviors and internalizing behaviors which consist of behaviors that are not marked by acting-out and are more subtle (Myers et al., 1999). Each participant described some type of behavioral difficulty in her child/or children. Of the ten children discussed by their mothers in this study, Carmen’s daughter appeared to have the most behavior problems. She exhibited both externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. She fought with the other children at school, refused to do school work, and refused to comply with her teachers and her mother at home; she would also refuse to eat food at home that Carmen prepared and often times would not eat at school. Eating disorders such as this have been reported in the literature as a behavior problem identified among children of incarcerated mothers (Johnston, 1995).

Beverly's sons, while not aggressive with other children, displayed acting out and aggressive behaviors with each other. Aggression and hostility toward peers is a frequently reported behavior in these children (Johnston, 1995; Kapfner, 1995). Beverly noted that these behaviors in her sons became noticeably worse after her second incarceration.

Darla's children were early adolescents at the time of her last and longest incarceration. It appears that her son and daughter began to experience the behavior problems seen in older children who have been separate from their mothers, due to incarceration on more than one occasion. Her children appeared to possibly be suffering from "enduring trauma." Enduring trauma are those stressors that go beyond the mother's incarceration, such as molestation, multiple parent-child separations, neglect and tend to cause anger and aggression, hostility toward caregivers, lying, stealing and emotional problems (Myers et al., 1999). Darla's children displayed angry, hostile behaviors toward others and toward Darla. Darla described their behaviors as belligerent and angry. Her daughter's behaviors were so angry that she would even lash out at people on her job and reportedly could not hold down a job because of her angry aggressive behaviors toward co-workers. Her son's association with a group of youths who were involved in criminal activities and substance abuse also fits the profile of behavior problems in adolescents who have experienced the ill effects of multiple separations due to multiple maternal incarcerations (Myers et al., 1999).

Earlene's children presented both externalizing behaviors such as the anger displayed by her older son and internalizing behavior problems such as the withdrawal



seen in her youngest son. There is no information in the literature to specifically label her daughter's clowning as a behavior problem. This may be more of a coping mechanism she began to employ as a way of dealing with the distress of the loss and loneliness caused by the forced separation from her mother.

### ***Educational Difficulties***

Educational difficulties such as poor school performance, failing grades, suspensions, extensive absences, and a high dropout rate are often seen in children of incarcerated mothers (Myers et al., 1999; Sacks et al., 1997). This is also true of the children discussed in this study.

Anna reported educational difficulties in both of her children. She indicated that the primary educational difficulties were with her son because of the amount of time he missed out of class and in the school clinic. He began to complain of feeling ill at school with headaches and stomachaches. Anna noted, "He was constantly feeling sick at school. He spent a lot of time in the clinic with headaches and stomachaches. His grades went down because he wasn't able to keep up with making up his work." Anna's daughter experienced a slight drop in her grades as a result of the impact of her mother's incarceration. Anna indicated, "Her grades went down just a little but she was still able to stay on the Honor Roll."

Beverly described what she believed to be an educational difficulty in one of her twin sons regarding his expressive language. Although each mother was asked to give her perception of difficulties that occurred as a result of the separation due to

incarceration, it is not certain that the educational difficulties experienced by Beverly's son were directly related to her incarceration. She reported,

[My son] gets speech help at school because he doesn't like to talk much. He's been getting that for a few years now. He wouldn't speak up in class when the teacher called on him and when he did it would take him a long time to answer.

Delays in expressive language that require special speech services are indicative of a significant educational disability however some children are considered to be selective mutes and choose in which settings they will speak (Accardo & Whitman, 2002). Beverly indicated that her son would talk with her at home but would not speak much at school.

Carmen reported that in addition to her daughter's significant behavioral difficulties at school, she also was not achieving at expected levels academically due to her refusal to do the work. Her educational difficulties were so significant that she was retained in kindergarten. Carmen indicated,

Oh she definitely had educational problems because she would not do her work half the time. Sometimes she would refuse to work and the teachers were always writing notes or calling my grandmother or me once I came home. She wasn't ready for first grade so she's in kindergarten again this year.

Darla's son and daughter both experienced educational difficulties similar to the types of educational difficulties reported in the literature. Her son was truant from school and eventually dropped out and her daughter could not focus on her school work. Darla reported,

Well, I know my son wasn't going to school like he was suppose to because he was hanging out with the dope boys and my daughter wasn't doing well in school either. She had a hard time concentrating in school. My son ended up dropping out.

Darla attributed her daughter's difficulties staying focused in school indirectly to her incarceration. Her daughter was sexually abused while Darla was incarcerated and Darla believed this caused her daughter to have difficulties concentrating in school. Darla indicated "My daughter tried but she couldn't focus because of the sexual abuse."

Earlene's indicated that only her youngest son experienced educational difficulties at school. She reported, "My youngest son had the problems in school. He was so quiet that they just overlooked him. He totally shut down in school. My other two kids did all right in school and didn't have any problems".

### ***Analysis of Educational Difficulties***

Poor school performance is a commonly reported problem in children with an incarcerated mother (Myers et al., 1999; Sacks et al., 1997). The children in this study also experienced educational difficulties which included a slight drop in grades as seen in Anna's daughter and her son, grade retention as indicated with Carmen's daughter, as well as her learning difficulties. Difficulties such as poor concentration, poor performance and a lack of motivation, as seen in Darla's daughter and Carmen's daughter are not uncommon. Darla's son dropped out of school which occurs at a greater rate in children with an incarcerated mother than in the general population (Sacks et al., 1997). One of Beverly's twin sons appeared to have educational difficulties

related to his expressive language and Earlene's youngest son was also unresponsive in school and was not achieving at expected levels.

Despite the adversity experienced by Beverly's other son and Earlene's two older children, they appeared to experience what might be considered resilience in regards to educational difficulties. They experienced social, emotional, and/or behavioral difficulties but reportedly were able to achieve at expected levels at school. This may be a result of other protective factors such as the supportive caretaking the children received in the absence of their mother and the ability to have some parental contact during separation that allowed these three children to successfully adapt in order to achieve at school.

### ***Summary of Difficulties Reported During Incarceration***

Bowlby (1988) has reported that considerable damage is done to a child who is separated from its mother. Children who experience forced separation from their mother due to incarceration suffer even more. This forced separation is a source of emotional injury to the child (Johnston, 1995). The children discussed in this study are no exception. All ten of the children suffered some negative impact as a result of being separated from their mother. Regardless of how the mothers classified the difficulties, each child experienced social, emotional, behavioral and/ or educational difficulties. Eight of the ten children reportedly experienced social difficulties in their mothers' absences. Nine of the ten children experienced emotional difficulties. All of the children experienced some type of behavioral difficulty, some more overt and aggressive than others, but all were impacted behaviorally by the separation. Six of the ten children

experienced educational difficulties ranging from poor concentration and decreased grades to grade retention and dropping out of school.

Anna's children were not exposed to some of the more negative influences as the other children such as poverty, a single parent household, or a high crime neighborhood, but they began to experience difficulties when Anna was incarcerated. Her daughter appeared to grieve her mother's absence and withdrew into herself as a possible means of coping with her absence. Her son developed somatic complaints which could also be viewed as a form of grieving his mother's absence (Johnston, 1995; Kampfner, 1995).

Beverly's sons and Darla's son and daughter experienced multiple separations from their mothers due to incarceration. These children's difficulties could be contributed to enduring trauma which results from children experiencing more than one separation from the mother due to incarceration. Darla's children in particular appeared to have significant social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties. Even when Darla was uncertain as to how to classify the difficulties her children were experiencing, they nonetheless suffered greatly as a result of their separations from her. Beverly's sons reportedly became increasingly more aggressive with each other after her second incarceration. She had spent more than half of their lives separated from them due to her incarcerations.

Carmen's daughter began to act out in the absence of her mother. She displayed angry and aggressive behaviors with both her peers and her teachers. She would refuse to comply with teacher directions and was not learning as a result of her behaviors.

Earlene's three children, having suffered the loss of their father and the incarceration of their mother, could be viewed as suffering from enduring trauma. Earlene also reported a period of homelessness, drug abuse and domestic violence which all had a negative impact on her children and contributed to the difficulties they suffered. These enduring traumas place her children at a greater risk for negative outcomes (Johnston, 1995; Myers et al., 1999; Travis & Waul, 2003).

All the children in this research study are at-risk for social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties as are the majority of children who have had or have an incarcerated mother. The social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties reported in the literature can also be seen in the children here, as reported by their mothers. Regardless of the age of the child at the time of the separation, or the length of the separation they all suffered the adverse effects of being separated from their mothers. These difficulties continued even after reunification with the mother.

#### Perceived Difficulties in the Children after Reunification

It is well documented that children suffer deeply when their mother is taken from them and incarcerated, but the pain these children feel is often ignored because there is a belief that the mother could not have been a good mother if she ended up in prison (Jose-Kampfner, 1995). However, this separation involves a high risk of harm not only while the mother is incarcerated but also after reunification. A study completed by Kampfner (1995) found that children continued to experience difficulties two to three years after the mothers' arrests and incarcerations.

The reports from the participants interviewed for this research study support the literature that children continue to experience difficulties after reunification with their mother. The mothers in this research were once again questioned about their perceptions regarding any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children exhibited after reunification.

### ***Social Difficulties after Reunification***

Several of the mothers interviewed described on-going social difficulties in their children after reunification. Carmen's daughter who began to exhibit aggressive behaviors when her mother was incarcerated continued to have social difficulties after she was reunited with her mother. Carmen reported that her daughter continued to have problems getting along with some of the other children at school, "She still has the problem at school with getting along with some of the kids, but it's not as bad as it was." As noted earlier, poor peer relationships are often evident as a social difficulty in children of incarcerated mothers (Sacks et al., 1987).

Darla's children also continued to have social difficulties after they were reunited with their mother. Her daughter's social difficulties related to her inability to get along with co-workers and maintain employment. Darla reported that her son continued to associate with high risk peers and engage in lawbreaking activities.

My son was still hanging out with a bad bunch and a couple of times I had to go out in the streets to confront him about what he was doing, selling drugs. He had dropped out of school and was running with the drug boys. I put myself in danger going out in the streets to get him.

Darla's son appeared to be living a lifestyle that could eventually result in him being incarcerated. His experiences as a child of an incarcerated mother increase the likelihood that he could also be incarcerated (Wright and Seymour, 2000).

Earlene noted that even after reunification her children had issues with trust that she perceived as a social difficulty. She noted,

When I got out of the halfway house and we got back together, like I said, there were a lot of issues. They were scared that I would go back to prison or that something else would happen. They are just now starting to get out and get to know people.

### ***Analysis of Social Difficulties after Reunification***

On-going social difficulties such as those described in this study are not uncommon in this population of children (Wright and Seymour, 2000). Reunification and reentry are an on-going process for both the mothers and their children. The way Earlene explained her reunification perhaps highlights the adjustment process during reunification. Earlene indicated that she had to reestablish the mother-child bond with her children before they could trust her and begin the healing process. The social difficulties reported during the time of the mothers' incarcerations continued upon their return home. Four of the five mothers in this study reported continued social difficulties in their children after reunification. Beverly did not report social difficulties in her sons during her incarceration or upon her return home. Anna's children reportedly had few social difficulties upon her return home, however the other children reported on in the study did not fare as well. Carmen's daughter continued to have poor peer relationships at school, Darla's son continued to participate in illegal activities and associate with a



bad group of peers and her daughter continued to be belligerent toward others, at her places of employment.

### ***Emotional Difficulties after Reunification***

Emotional difficulties in children of incarcerated mothers are not the type of problem that children can easily overcome (Kampfner, 1995). The mothers in this study all reported continued emotional difficulties in their children after reunification.

Anna indicated that her son and daughter continued to have difficulties that she felt were emotional. She reported, “My daughter... I think she is still a little depressed and scared that something else might happen to me. My son still goes to the clinic at school more than we would like.”

Beverly also indicated on-going emotional difficulties with her twin sons, she noted, “My boys continue to have some problems.” Beverly indicated that one of her sons continued to sit for long periods of time rocking himself and sucking his thumb. She also reported about this son,

He’s very quiet and just doesn’t seem to be able to handle anything really stressful. He needs to know what is going on and what I am doing all the time. He still doesn’t talk much but he talks to me the most.

Beverly’s son appeared to regress to behaviors usually found in younger children. This is an emotional difficulty also reported in other research studies, such as Johnston (1995), who reported that children of incarcerated mothers may be slow to develop autonomy and independence and may also regress to less mature behaviors as a result of the trauma from separation.

Carmen reported that her daughter's emotional difficulties continued after their reunification. It also appeared that some of the emotional difficulties Carmen identified began once Carmen and her daughter were reunited. She indicated that when she arrived home her daughter would not recognize her as her mother. Carmen reported, "She told me that her Nana was her mommy." Carmen also noted that her daughter would not come out of her room and would not hug Carmen. Her daughter also developed eating problems. Carmen reported,

At first she wouldn't eat anything that I fixed for her, nothing, not even a bowl of cereal. She still has some eating problems and has lost some weight. She still has some problems at school with getting along with some of the kids. I just think that my incarceration was hard on her and she could not put it in words how she was feeling so she just acted out. I think that's why she won't eat what I fix for her. I think she's angry at me and instead of saying so she just won't eat most of what I cook.

Carmen's incarceration and separation from her daughter occurred at a time in her daughter's early development when the parent-child bonding is essential to developing secure attachments (Bowlby, 1988). Carmen's daughter appears to have developed some issues around bonding with her mother and insecure attachments. Her attachment appears to be with her grandmother who became the sole mother figure in her life during Carmen's incarceration.

Darla also indicated that her daughter continued to have some emotional difficulties after their reunification. Darla reported that she believed these emotional difficulties were related to her absence because of her incarceration and the sexual abuse her daughter experienced during the time Darla was incarcerated. Darla indicated, "She didn't want to talk to anybody about it and she was very angry about it."

Darla's daughter's sexual molestation could be considered a repeated trauma which often times results in emotional problems (Myers et al., 1999).

According to Earlene, her three children experienced what she described as emotional difficulties after their reunification with her. She reported that when they were first reunited her children did not appear to trust her, they had difficulty sleeping and they were scared. She also reported, "They didn't trust me at first, when we first got back together. They couldn't sleep, they were scared. They didn't know if I would be gone when they woke up." Earlene noted a number of other emotional issues in her children upon their reunification,

They would cry a lot. We slept together a lot when I first got back together because we had to reestablish that bond with each other. So that was a big emotional thing. There were a lot of emotions with my daughter and with my boys. My son who was being raised by my mother started acting in a very effeminate way. He still behaves that way now that we are back together. He is very emotional. For a long time they were scared.

The emotional difficulties Earlene's children displayed confirm that regardless of the child's age, separation from the mother is a traumatic experience for children that can have long lasting effects which include emotional difficulties (Bowlby, 1973).

### ***Analysis of Emotional Difficulties after Reunification***

When children are separated from their mothers it becomes a source of emotional injury to the child and often has profound effects, as seen in the children discussed by their mothers in this study. The children feel a sense of loss and loneliness, and will grieve as though the mother has died (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). The separation also places the children at greater risk for emotional difficulties later in life (Johnston,

1995). Each participant reported some form of perceived on-going emotional difficulty in her child/children after reunification. It appeared that the mothers were not always certain about what constituted an emotional difficulty and sometimes comingled their descriptions of emotional and behavioral difficulties or indicated that the emotional difficulties came out in the child's behaviors. Nevertheless, emotional difficulties were indicated and appeared prevalent in the children discussed by the mothers in this study.

Emotionally, Darla's daughter appeared to have the greatest degree of difficulty, which Darla contributed partially to the rape her daughter experienced while separated from her. Her emotional issues were so severe that she spoke of suicide and blamed Darla for her difficulties. The dual traumas she experienced including the forced separations from her mother and the rape place this young woman at a greater risk for post traumatic stress disorder and the emotional difficulties seen in children with this syndrome (Kampfner, 1995). According to Darla, her daughter continues to have emotional difficulties but will not talk with anyone about her difficulties.

The withdrawal from social activities except church related activities and general withdrawal at home are indicative of some on-going emotional difficulties with Anna's daughter after reunification. This is also common in children with an incarcerated mother because of the social stigma (the shame associated with having a mother in prison) felt in the neighborhood and sometimes at school. Children of incarcerated mothers are often teased at school (Wright & Seymour, 2000). Her daughter may have felt that church was a safe place where people would not judge her mother for making a mistake resulting in her incarceration or her family.

Earlene's children were fearful when they first reunited with their mother, they cried a lot, and could not sleep unless they slept with her. They appeared to continue having fears of being separated from their mother again and displayed some signs of being traumatized. One of Beverly's twin sons displayed signs of being emotionally withdrawn because of his issues with rocking himself and sucking his thumb. These behaviors could be viewed as self-regulating types of behaviors that children will often engage in to calm and relax themselves (Barkley, 1997).

### ***Behavioral Difficulties after Reunification***

The behavior difficulties that children are susceptible to when a mother is incarcerated occur both during the mother's incarceration and often continue after reunification (Baunach, 1985). The reports of some of the mothers in this study confirm that behavioral difficulties did continue in their child/children after reunification.

Anna did not indicate any behavioral difficulties that continued with her children upon her return. The issues noted with her daughter she felt were more a factor of adolescence than an actual clinical behavioral problem related specifically to her incarceration. Regarding her son she stated, "Since I've been home he hasn't had any problems." About her daughter she reported,

My daughter would sometimes get angry and talk back and she still does. I think it is more a factor of that mother-daughter teenager thing and I think she is still a little angry at me for the time I was away from her. I try to spend more time with her and explain that it was a mistake in judgment for me to do what I did and that I was wrong. I also explain to both my children that I paid for my mistake and learned from it and I don't plan on repeating it or being incarcerated ever again.

Beverly reported that her sons continued to fight with one another more than what she believed was normal. She suggested that the increase in this behavior was noted after her second incarceration. She stated, "They still fight with each other. When I came home from my first incarceration I noticed that the boys would fight sometimes, but it wasn't like it is not. It really got bad when I was incarcerated the second time."

Carmen indicated that her daughter continued to have some behavioral problems with hitting the other children at school if she became angry or upset. Carmen stated, "She still has the problems at school with getting along with some of the kids, but it's not as bad as it was. She has learned that she can't lose control when she becomes upset and angry and hit anyone."

Darla believed that both her son and daughter had behavioral difficulties after their reunification. She indicated, "Both my kids had behavior problems. When I came home they would say things to me because I hadn't been there. My daughter would twist things that I would say to her and become very angry."

Earlene reported that her youngest son was behaviorally shut down. She indicated, "My youngest son, he shut down totally. He didn't want to talk, he didn't want to share. He's still very quiet and won't talk much but he still needs to get some things out."

### ***Analysis of Behavioral Difficulties after Reunification***

Behavioral difficulties such as anger, aggression, hostility toward siblings and caregivers, anxiety, and withdrawal can be found in children at all ages who have suffered the forced separation from their mother due to incarceration (Baunach, 1985; Johnston, 1995; Myers et al., 1995; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). Four of the five participants in this study reported some significant concern with behavioral difficulties in their child/children. Similar behaviors as reported in the literature can be seen in the reports of the participants in this study. Beverly's sons were aggressive and hostile with one another; Baunach (1985) found that 70% of children with an incarcerated mother exhibited externalizing behaviors such as hostility toward a sibling or others. Baunach (1985) also noted internalizing behavior difficulties such as withdrawal, which was displayed by one of Beverly's sons. Carmen's daughter was angry and aggressive with other children and her teachers at school; she exhibited more of the externalizing type of behavior problems.

Darla described her children's angry behaviors toward others and herself as belligerent. Her children had suffered from multiple separations and perhaps were experiencing the effects of repeated trauma which can include angry behavior and hostility toward caregivers (Baunach, 1985). The behavior concerns Earlene described in her three children included withdrawal behaviors in all the children, effeminate behaviors in her eldest son and clowning behaviors in her daughter.

### ***Educational Difficulties after Reunification***

School aged children who have experienced maternal separation due to incarceration often have poor school performance (Kampfner, 1995). These children can experience problems with concentrating in the classroom and a lack of motivation. The difficulties can also persist after reunification as we see in some of the children in this study.

Anna's son continued to have some educational difficulties after she returned home. She indicated, "My son still goes to the clinic at school more than we would like but his grades are getting better with the help he gets. He still works in those groups for his math."

Beverly reported that one of her twin sons continued to receive help with his speech/language skills at school. She noted,

The way the teacher explained it, he works in a small group with other children and they learn how to talk with each other. They answer questions about different things they have learned in the classroom so it helps them answer the teacher in the class.

Carmen indicated the following regarding educational difficulties her daughter continued to experienced after their reunification,

Sometimes she would refuse to work and the teachers were always writing notes or calling my grandmother or me once I came home. Then her behavior got a little better but she wasn't ready for first grade so she's in kindergarten again this year. I think having her repeat kindergarten is a good thing. They are going to test her because they think she might have ADHD.



Darla reported that her son continued to have educational difficulties to the degree that he dropped out of school, “He was hanging out with a bad bunch. He had dropped out of school.” She also reported continued educational difficulties in her daughter, “My daughter tried but she couldn’t focus and learn in school because of the sexual abuse she experienced. She tried to go to a cosmetology program but she wasn’t able to finish.”

Earlene noted that her youngest son continued to have educational difficulties when she came home,

He totally shut down in school. I tried to get him tested and everything but the school wouldn’t do anything even though he shut down and wasn’t learning anything. They said they did interventions or something but he still wasn’t learning right. He got some help from Sylvan.

### ***Analysis of Educational Difficulties after Reunification***

Poor school performance is a common problem among children who have an incarcerated mother; difficulties such as poor concentration, impaired memory, suspension, failing grades, extensive absences, school phobia and high dropout rates have been reported ( Sacks, et al., 1997; Myers, et al., 1999; Young & Smith, 2000). Six of the ten children reported on in this study also experienced some form of educational difficulty.

Anna’s son appeared to have difficulty concentrating in school and made frequent trips to the clinic resulting in missed class time and falling grades. This seemed to be an avoidance type of behavior and an inability to stay on task and focused in the classroom, since no physical reason was ever found for his physical complaints. One of

Beverly's twin sons exhibited poor school performance in that he would not respond to his teacher or converse with others at school. Retention was a consequence of Carmen's daughter's difficulties at school. Darla's son dropped out of school and her daughter was unable to finish a cosmetology program because of difficulties remaining focused in school. Earlene's youngest son was withdrawn at school and would not participate.

All the educational difficulties discussed by the mothers in this study are also the types of educational difficulties reported in the literature. The educational difficulties run the spectrum from falling grades and grade repetition to completely dropping out of school (Myers, et al., 1999; Young & Smith, 2000).

### ***Summary of Difficulties Reported After Reunification***

It is evident that all of the children of the participants in this study experienced social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties during the time they were separated from their mothers due to her incarceration. Additionally, the majority of these children also continued to experience significant difficulties once they were reunited to live full time with their mothers. Anna's children appeared to have the least residual effects as a result of her separation from them. Her children had a consistent support system in place both during her incarceration and after Anna's reunification with them that included their stepfather, their grandmother and their church family. They were able to receive assistance for a great deal of their needs from programs such as tutoring provided by their church, counseling and overall support.

Beverly's sons' behavioral problems as siblings continued to be a concern for her as well as the educational difficulties experienced by one of the twins. Carmen's

daughter's educational and behavioral difficulties seemed to be improving now that they are reunited, however there are continuing difficulties that require some intervention. The school appears to be addressing her educational needs by providing some services to address her educational delays and behavioral concerns.

For Anna, Beverly and Carmen their reunification has been less than two years and their children are continuing to experience the adverse effects of being separated from their mother. The mothers and their children appear to need to reestablish their parent-child relationship. Darla and Earlene had been reunited with their children for a few years longer but their children also continue to experience significant social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties.

Table 2 shows the types of difficulties the children of the five previously incarcerated mothers experienced both during the time the mother was incarcerated and upon reunification with the mother. In each situation the difficulties experienced during the time the mother was incarcerated continued upon reunification. Even the children who had been reunited with their mother for more than two years continued to have difficulties.

Table 2

## Difficulties Experienced by the Children of the Incarcerated Mothers in the Study

	Social	Emotional	Behavioral	Educational
Name	Difficulties	Difficulties	Difficulties	Difficulties
Anna's Son	No	Yes	No	Yes
Anna's daughter	Yes	Yes	No	No
Beverly's Twin Son	No	No	Yes	No
Beverly's Twin Son	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carmen's daughter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Darla's son	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Darla's daughter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Earlene's daughter	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Earlene's oldest son	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Earlene's second son	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

***Summary of Children's Difficulties***

The five participants in the study described difficulties in their children that were classified as either social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties. All the children reportedly experienced these difficulties as a result of the separation from their mothers due to her incarceration. The social, emotional, behavioral, and/or educational difficulties were experienced both during the term of the mother's incarceration and when the children were reunited with their mothers.

### **Mothers Perceptions Regarding Beneficial Interventions**

In addition to acquiring mothers' perceptions regarding the types of difficulties their children experienced during and after their incarceration, I also wanted to obtain their perceptions about what they felt would be helpful for their children in terms of assistance and/or interventions. This population is described as the riskiest of the high risk children in our country (Myers, et al., 1999) and as such must undoubtedly require some type of intervention to aid them in coping with their difficulties. Frequent contact with the mother during the time she is incarcerated has been voiced as a major form of intervention for the children. Engelbert, (2001) believes that this is the only way to minimize the severe emotional trauma experienced by these children. Visitation with the mother has been identified as a protective factor for the children against internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Kazura, 2001).

Each mother believed that some intervention would have been or was beneficial in helping her child or children deal with the social, emotional, behavioral or educational difficulties they experienced due to separation as the result of incarceration. Only one mother, Earlene, was able to have visitations with her children and spoke of this as an important factor for her children. She noted, "I think by them seeing me and seeing that I was alright was good for them. They were able to see me and that was the most important thing."

Anna reported a faith based approach to her children's assistance/interventions, especially for her daughter. She indicated,

I think her church activities kept her pretty stable. With the family all being involved, I think that was the best thing for her and my son. My

mom had my children in counseling with our church and they still participate. I think that the counseling is the best thing especially since it's Christian counseling. Our faith is very important and I think keeping them involved in the church was really good for them.

The other mothers were not as fortunate to have such a variety of resources available to their children while they were incarcerated. Beverly indicated that her twin sons did not have the advantage of receiving any type of assistance while she was incarcerated. She reported about her twin sons,

They didn't get any help when I was away, not really. I think my boys needed to have their dad involved with them, but he wasn't around. My mother did a good job with the boys. She did her best but she wasn't able to get them to counseling or anything like that. They aren't getting any kind of help, but I'm going to see about getting them some help. Maybe somebody for them to talk to or something like a big brother since their dad isn't really involved.

Carmen indicated that her daughter did not receive any assistance/intervention for her difficulties while she was incarcerated, but she believed that some form of counseling would be beneficial. She reported,

They don't have any kind of counselors at her school and I haven't been able to get her any counseling or anything yet. I think that would be good for her. I think she has a lot of anger in her because I was gone for so long. I think the counseling would be good for her. Maybe it would help her be less angry and talk about what's bothering her. I think if she gets counseling that will help with her behavior at school.

Darla also reported that her children did not get any type of assistance or intervention while she was separated from them. She noted,

They didn't get any kind of help. I think that if they had had somebody to talk to they would have been better. My mother was there and my brothers and sister were around but they didn't have anyone professional

to talk to. I tried to get them some help when I got out but they wouldn't talk to anyone about the things that were bothering them. When I came home I talked to her about seeing somebody and had been directing her to people with their LISW so she could talk to somebody. My daughter said she didn't want to talk with anyone and my son was in the streets. Earlene's children did not receive any type of assistance while they were

separated from her. Earlene indicated,

My children didn't get any help like professional help while I was incarcerated. My family was there for them but they didn't really know how to help. They provided food and a roof over their heads, but they couldn't really help. They did get counseling once I got out and got them back and I think they needed that. My social worker helped me to make sure I got help for my kids and tutoring for their education and different things like that. I think the counseling helped the most. We all needed that. We are doing better now. They are doing better now, we are pretty close.

### ***Analysis of Mother's Perceptions of Beneficial Interventions***

Each mother perceived that her child or children could have received benefit from some type of assistance, such as individual counseling with a social worker or professional counselor, tutoring at school, or mentoring, while they were separated. Only one participant reported any type of intervention occurring. Anna's children received counseling and tutoring services as well as spiritual support and guidance from her church. Anna believed it was important to have a faith based approach for her children's interventions. Her husband and her mother were supportive to make sure this occurred while Anna was away and upon her return home. The other mothers indicated that while family members were available to provide caretaking for the children, no formal interventions were put in place. The mothers viewed formal interventions such

as counseling or someone with whom to talk, tutoring at school, and spiritual guidance as ways to help their children cope with the trauma of separation.

The literature (Beckerman, 1994) tells us that most incarcerated mothers and their family members rely primarily on each other, rather than on any formal organizations to address children's problems during their incarceration. This occurs because of a lack of trust of formal organizations as well as a tendency to find those organizations to be less than helpful.

### **Other Important Findings**

The core of this study focused on examining mother's perceptions regarding any social, emotional, behavioral, and/or educational difficulties their young children experienced as a result of their separation due to maternal incarceration. However, during the course of the interviews, and in relation to some of the interview questions, other information was revealed that is important to this body of research. These issues are relevant because in addition to the adverse impact from the separation, these factors also have an impact on the children of incarcerated mothers. These other important themes centered on issues of child visitation, secrecy about the mother's incarceration and caretakers for the children left behind. Most incarcerated mothers receive limited or no visitations from their children during the term of their incarceration (Young & Smith, 2000). Secrecy about the whereabouts of the mother is an issue that effects the psyche of the child (Hagen & Myers, 2003), and lastly, the issue of caretakers for the children is very important. Approximately 55% of children



transition to the care of their grandparents, 20% to their fathers, 15% to another relative or family friend and 10% to foster care (Child Welfare League of America, 1998).

### ***Child Visitations***

An important theme to the body of this research involved child visitations with the mother during her internment. When children are unable to visit with their mother, it adds to the stress the children already feel (Young & Smith, 2000). Regular and frequent visits are highly recommended as a way to reduce the adverse impact of the mother-child separation; however, the majority of children of incarcerated mothers resided too far from the mother's place of incarceration to visit at all (Fuller, 1993; Meyers et al., 1999). This appears to be the norm in this research as well, only one mother reported receiving visitations with her children during her incarceration and those visits were terminated later in her term of incarceration. Earlene provided the following about her children,

The children were able to visit about three times while I was in there because my mom said that it was too painful for her to see me there. We had pretty good visits. They were pretty good. They were as well as could be expected. I wasn't able to really touch them or have any real contact. We talked a lot. The visits were good for me to see that they were all right but I'm sure it was hard for them to see me there and not be able to be with me. They were able to see me and that was the most important thing. So it was kind of like giving them some relief and security to know that I still loved them and that I would still be there for them.

None of the other mothers reported visitations with their children during the term of their incarceration. For some of the mothers this was their choice not to receive visits or the decision of the caretakers of the children.

Anna indicated, "My children did not visit me while I was incarcerated. I did not want them to see me there. I just didn't think it was good for them." Some researchers would agree with Ann. Poehlman (2005) suggested that more contact with mothers at the prison contributed to children's fear because of the institutional setting. Others suggest that visitations serve as a protective factor for the children of incarcerated mothers (Kazura, 2001).

Beverly added, "No one came to visit me while I was incarcerated. I got letters and that was it. My mother couldn't bring herself to visit or to bring them."

Carmen reported the following about her daughter and visitations, "My daughter never came to visit. We talked on the phone a few times and I wrote to her to send her cards and things but no one brought her to visit me. My grandmother wasn't able to do that."

When asked about her children being able to visit Darla reported, "None at all. My family did not want my children to know where I was at and I didn't tell them when I talked to them."

### ***Analysis of Child Visitations***

Like most incarcerated mothers who never receive visits from their children (Young & Smith, 2000), the majority of the mothers in this study did not receive visits from their children. Only one of the five mothers was able to have direct visitation with her children and these visits did not continue through the term of her incarceration. Various reasons were given for the lack of visitation such as the inability to get the

children to the facility where the mother was incarcerated, the mother's request not to have the children visit, and deception/secretcy about the whereabouts of the mother.

#### Secrecy about the Mother's Incarceration

In addition to most children being unable to visit with their mothers during the period of incarceration, most children are also not told the truth about their mother's whereabouts during her absence (Myers, et al., 1999). This is referred to as a conspiracy of silence. This secrecy or conspiracy of silence (Kapfner, 1995) has also been demonstrated to be a source of stress for the children and adversely affects their psyche (Johnston, 1995). Some of the participants in this study reported similar situations with their children.

Beverly experienced multiple incarcerations while her boys were young and they were not informed of her whereabouts. Beverly reported,

The first time I was incarcerated my family didn't tell my boys where I was at, they were too young to understand. The second time, I was arrested at home and they were there and knew what happened, but my mother couldn't bring herself to visit or to bring them. So they still didn't really know or understand where I was at.

Carmen also indicated that her daughter did not know where she was during her period of incarceration. She noted, "She did not know where I was. I would talk to [her] on the phone sometime, but she didn't know where I was at."

Darla's situation was similar to the other participants in the study. She reported,

My children went through a lot when I was gone. They didn't know where I was at, they thought I was visiting my sick father. I really never told them I was incarcerated. My family did not want my children to know where I was at and I didn't tell them when I talked to them.

### ***Analysis of Secrecy***

The reports from these participants regarding the secrecy surrounding their incarcerations support the findings in the literature that there is a “conspiracy of silence” that exists about maternal incarceration (Myers, et al., 1999). This secrecy is also suggested to cause the children of incarcerated mothers to be more prone to acute traumatic stress reaction (post-traumatic stress disorder) (Kampfner, 1995).

Three of the five participants reported some form of deception or secrecy surrounding their whereabouts during the term of their incarceration. Beverly’s sons did not know her whereabouts during her first incarceration and although they were at home when she was arrested the second time, they were too young to understand and no explanation was given. Carmen’s daughter was only three years old when Carmen was incarcerated and was not told about her mother’s incarceration. Darla’s family supplied her children with a typical fabrication regarding excuses given for a mother’s absence. Her family told her children that she was away caring for a sick relative. However, Darla indicated that she believed her children knew when she was incarcerated because she had received reports that the other children in the neighborhood had teased her children regarding their mother being in jail.

### ***Caretakers for the Children Left Behind***

The final theme that presented as an important element of the research was child care arrangements for the children left behind. Since most incarcerated mothers are single parents, the father is not available to provide for the care of the children (Young, 2000). In the case of the ten children of the five participants interviewed for this

study, all the children were cared for by a family member and not placed in the foster care system. Sullum (1999) suggests that children who spend more than three years in the foster system could suffer permanent psychological damage. He also indicated that more than three years in the foster system leads to permanent psychological damage for any child.

Anna was the only married participant in the study who was able to have her spouse remain behind with her children. Her mother also lived with them and was able to provide additional support for her children. Anna reported the following regarding caretakers for her two children,

I was married at the time and my mother lived with us and my two children, so they both took care of my two kids. My mother did most of the work, she provided most of the care because my husband worked a lot of overtime and wasn't around as much. My mom did a good job of talking to my kids about what happened. She was really my rock. She made sure that the kids got to school and church and all their activities. I didn't worry a lot about their care because I knew they were being well cared for. I knew my husband would provide for them financially and my mom would make sure they were well cared for.

Beverly reported that family members also provided care for her twin sons while she was incarcerated. She indicated,

My mother took care of my boys while I was away. I was living in her downstairs apartment before I was incarcerated. While I was away my aunt also helped take care of my boys and so did my younger brother and sister. They were all really good with my boys and everybody was in the same house so they didn't have to go anywhere.

Carmen, who herself experienced the affects of separation due to maternal incarceration credited her grandmother for providing care for her daughter. She noted,

My grandmother took care of my daughter. She's all I have and all my daughter has because my mom is in prison. I was incarcerated when [she] was three so my grandmother has been the stable figure in her life.

Darla reported that her mother along with her brothers and sister and a friend helped to provide care for her two children. She indicated,

When I was down there in the penitentiary my family had to take care of my children. So my children, my son and my daughter, they were staying with my mom who had seven other children. My mom, my brothers, and my sister all helped. It worked out pretty good because we were already living there with my mom. I had six brothers and a sister who were still living at home and my first husband's mother was helping with my children as well. I also had a friend that my daughter stayed with sometimes too.

Earlene's three children were separated and cared for by two family members. She reported, "I thank God that I had a mother and a sister. My mother and my sister took care of my children while I was incarcerated. My mother had my oldest son and my sister had my two younger children."

### ***Analysis of Caretakers***

All ten of the children discussed by their mothers in this study were fortunate to have family members available to provide care in the absence of the mother. Since foster care can result in additional psychological damage for this already risky group of children, the kinship care provided could be viewed as a positive result in an otherwise negative situation for these children. As indicated earlier, foster care is not an ideal situation for children, and presiding judge James R. Miliken of the juvenile court of San Diego County suggests that, "foster care can be worse for a child than staying with a drug-addicted mother" (Sullum,1999).

### ***Analysis of Other Important Issues***

Children suffer when they experience a forced separation from their mother due to incarceration (Johnson & Gable, 1995). The separation from the mother contributes to social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties in the children. Additionally, other factors such as child visitation, secrecy about the whereabouts of the mother and caretaker arrangements, related to the mother's incarceration serve to add to the injury these children feel. These other factors are also apparent in this study.

The lack of opportunity for children to visit with their mother during incarceration was also consistent in this study. Although visitations are highly recommended, most children, including the children reported on in this study do not have the opportunity to visit with their mother while she is incarcerated.

The adverse effect on a child when he or she is separated from their mother due to incarceration is so great that it qualifies these children to be labeled the riskiest of the at-risk children in our country (Myers, et al., 1999). The children in this study also suffered the adverse effect of forced separation due to maternal incarceration.

### **Researcher Observations from Women's Support Group Meetings**

In addition to the general demographics provided on the mothers participating in the study, knowledge was acquired on the women during observation of some of their support group sessions. All of the participants were either participating in a re-entry support group or had previously participated in such a group. During the support group the women discussed a variety of topics dealing with issues such as faith, thanksgiving, fears, motivation, self-respect, survival, and self-improvement. They

participated in activities designed to promote future planning, improve self-concept, and promote self-improvement. Counselors help the women analyze and understand their backgrounds then move to set goals and ways to achieve those goals.

The reentry support group meetings were held on a weekly basis. The women met in a small room in the basement of a community service agency. Each week snacks were provided and the social worker in charge always set a relaxed tone to the meetings. Most of the women contributed to the discussions and appeared sincere about taking advantage of the support the group offered. There were, on the average, six women in attendance each week at the nine support group meetings I attended. The majority of women participating were African American and most were mothers to either minor or adult children. I was privileged to be allowed to observe the women and sometime participate in activities with them, approximately once a month for almost seven months. I was consistently impressed with the amount of strength and determination demonstrated by the women. I was also touched by the stories some of the women told about the hardships they had faced in their lives and the struggles they had overcome to gain control over their lives.

The value of being able to observe the women discuss a variety of issues in their lives provided me with a greater understanding of the hardships they face on a daily basis. It also provided me with a feeling that the women involved were on the right track to once again assume lives as contributing members of society.



Carmen was a regular at the meetings and perhaps the most outspoken. She impressed me most during a session held on November 6, 2006 on the topic, Biggest Lessons Learned from Past Relationships. She commented,

One of the biggest lessons I have learned from past relationships is not to give up on myself and to get myself together. I have learned to make the Word of God the standard for my conduct and to begin each day in prayer and meditation. I have learned to put God first and not man. That's what helps me.

During the holiday season the topics turned to issue of thankfulness and new beginnings. The women spoke of being thankful to be able to spend time with their families and the peace that freedom brought. A poem by Virginia Satir (1976) was posted in the room and alluded to by Beverly. She read the poem for the group,

#### The Five Freedoms

The freedom to see and hear what is here instead of what should be, was, or will be.

The freedom to say what one feels and thinks, instead of what one should.

The freedom to feel what one feels, instead of what one ought.  
The freedom to ask for what one wants, instead of always waiting for permission.

The freedom to take risks in one's own behalf, instead of choosing to be only "secure" and not rocking the boat.

After Beverly read the poem there was silence in the room for a moment before she added, "I've been locked up so much that sometimes freedom scares me. I'm afraid of going back to the penitentiary and losing my freedom again."

Another woman in the group, Grace, an older woman who had been absent for several meetings, began to cry. She spoke to Beverly and told her that she had found strength in the words of the Bible in Jeremiah, saying, "The Word says the Lord will restore you and heal you." She proceeded by announcing to the group that she would probably be losing her freedom again because of having "a dirty urine." A dirty urine means that she had tested positive for drugs at her screening. This was a violation of her probation and could result in her returning to prison. She asked for the prayers of the other women.

During two sessions the women were treated to facials and makeovers by representatives from Mary Kay Cosmetics. This was a more interactive time when the women were encouraged to take care of themselves by working on the person from the inside out. Techniques were demonstrated on how to properly cleanse and moisturize the face before applying makeup. Discussions were held on aroma therapy and various relaxation techniques including massage. The purpose behind these sessions fit in with the philosophy of the re-entry program that services to previously incarcerated women need to be "holistic" to be effective. Faith, spirituality, and belief in a higher power were topics that came up regularly during support group sessions. The women believed that their faith helped to sustain them during their time of incarceration.

The overall purpose of these group sessions was to provide a place of support for the women and to give them skills that would make their re-entry into the community successful. The support groups provided the women with an open forum to discuss feelings and gave voice to their life struggles.

### **Summary of Researcher Observations of Support Group**

The time I spent listening to these women, hearing their stories, and participating in activities with them was an enlightening and invaluable experience. Their discussions allowed them to have a voice to express their experiences, fears, accomplishments and hopes. Their life experiences were similar to descriptions of incarcerated women/mothers in the literature. Some of the women lived lives of poverty and committed their crimes as a means of survival. Some type of drug involvement was a consistent theme among the women in the group. The women who were mothers confirmed the problems, challenges, and opportunities they faced with their children.

The reports from the women in the group highlight the fact that female incarceration has a damaging effect on the structure and functioning of the family, especially the children left behind. As I reflected on the issues that were brought up during the support group sessions my thoughts took me back more than twenty-five years to my former student who found herself in similar situations as these women. The difference is that twenty-five years ago a woman in prison was a novelty, but today there are more women than ever serving time in our nation's prisons and the majority of incarcerated women are African-American. This is born true in the basic statistical data showing the numbers of African American women doing time. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2007) indicates that across all age groups, Black women are incarcerated between 2.8 and 4.3 times the rate of white women. It has been suggested that Black women have almost single-handedly expanded the women's prison complex

(Hutchinson, 2006). The overall status of African American women under the law for over twenty-five years has significantly declined. Despite their hardships the women in the support group demonstrated the courage to attempt to rebuild their lives, resist oppression and exert their human dignity. Observing the support group also enhanced the fact that a re-entry process is valuable to create a positive life after incarceration and to possibly prevent recidivism.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Answer to the Questions Guiding the Research**

This research builds on the assumption that children suffer in numerous ways when they are separated from their mother due to incarceration. More than any other type of involuntary separation, maternal incarceration has dire consequences for the children left behind.

Specifically, the study assumed that the mothers would report some type of social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulty in their child and/or children that was precipitated by the mother's absence due to incarceration and continued upon reunification. It was also assumed that some type of services in the form of counseling or other type of intervention would be beneficial to assist their child and/or children with any of these difficulties.

#### **Findings in Relationship to the Research Questions**

I identified three questions to guide my research and will revisit those questions to discuss the research findings further. Each of the three questions is indicated below.

### ***Research Question 1***

*What are the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding their incarceration and any social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties their children experienced during their separation?*

As I assumed, the stories told by each of the five mothers interviewed relate perceived difficulties in all their children during the time they were incarcerated. Each child manifests difficulties that were indicative of at least one of the categories generated from the research questions (social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational). Some of the children exhibited problems in more than one of these areas. Each mother reported her own view of an area. In some cases the difficulties described by the mothers overlapped, such as social difficulties and behavioral difficulties or social difficulties and emotional difficulties.

These problems were evident while the mothers were incarcerated based upon reports to the mothers by the kinship caregivers. In most instances the family role expectations of an incarcerated mother center on some demonstration of care and concern for the child and/or children left behind by participating in family life by calling home, sending birthday cards, and writing letters to encourage the children (Travis & Waul, 2003). By maintaining contact in this manner the participants were able to receive information on the functioning of their children in their absence.

Because children live and grow in the context of a social environment, good social skills have consistently been viewed as essential to adequate adaptation and development (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Social skills that are necessary for

interacting successfully with peers and adults include such things as making and keeping friends, getting along with coworkers and/or classmates, participating in school-related activities and out of school activities . Interpersonal skills such as complementing others, saying please and thank you and encouraging others are additional important social skills.

The social difficulties described by the participant mothers consist of problems in most of the aforementioned areas, and included such difficulties as withdrawing from social activities that were once enjoyed and isolation from social interactions with others, as reported by Anna about her daughter. During her interview Anna told the researcher that prior to her incarceration her daughter enjoyed going to the mall with friends and family and spent time with friends in social activities outside of school. After her incarceration these social activities diminished. Earlene was another mother who reported that her children began to isolate themselves from social contact with others, “They didn’t want to get close to people.” Earlene felt that this difficulty was due to her absence. Perhaps the most compelling example of a literature noted side effect (Johnston, 1995) of the harmful impact of maternal incarceration can be seen in the description Darla gave about her son’s social difficulties. During her absence he had begun associating with other youths who were engaging in criminal activity involving drugs. He also stole from family members and would use profanity toward others in anger. Wright and Seymour (2000) spoke specifically to the fact that children of incarcerated mothers are more likely to engage in lawbreaking activities and six times more likely to be incarcerated themselves. Substance abuse, gang activity, lying and

stealing are additional social types of difficulties that could be present in the child of an incarcerated mother (Myers et al., 1999), especially a child who has experienced multiple separations like Darla's son. Carmen's daughter's altercations with other children at school resulted in limited social contact with another child. Her social interactions with other children appear to be atypical for a child her age. Usually young children her age will engage in cooperative play with one another.

The reports of the participants provide valuable information for recognizing some social difficulties children of incarcerated mother may experience as a result of this separation. By understanding that these difficulties have a negative impact on the functioning of children and their future well-being those who advocate for this population may be successful in acquiring support.

Children of incarcerated mothers often feel that they have little emotional supports. They report a need to talk with someone about their experiences but often find that there is no one available to provide that support (Kampfner, 1995). This proved to be true in this research as well. The majority of the children reported on did not have supports in place to address their emotional needs. While family was available to provide supports for basic needs, there were no formal supports in place such as individual or group counseling.

Emotional difficulties in children can manifest in a variety of ways including depression, anxiety, withdrawal, sleep disturbance and somatic problems such as eating disorders or over reporting of physical complaints (Myers et al., 1999). The emotional difficulties described by the mothers in this study included a number of these problems.



Anna believed that her daughter was showing signs of depression, which manifested in behaviors such as sleeping more than usual, crying a lot, and withdrawing from activities she once enjoyed. Anna also suggested that her son's excessive complaints of stomach aches and headaches at school were indicative of some type of emotional difficulty. Anna seemed to be sensitive to her children's difficulties and the changes in their functioning after her separation from them. Her description of her son's physical complaints could definitely be attributed to a generalized anxiety disorder caused by the separation from his mother. Children who have a generalized anxiety disorder will often complain of physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach aches that cannot be explained (Koplewicz, 1996). Anna's perceptions about her daughter experiencing depression could also be accurate especially her description of her daughter's prolonged mood of sadness which is a symptom of depression (Kopelwicz, 1996).

Darla viewed her daughter's suicide ideation as an emotional difficulty. She indicated that her daughter wanted to kill herself and on one occasion was taken to an emergency room for care. Suicide wishes or threats such as these carry serious implications that should be evaluated by a mental health professional to determine the necessary treatment (Koplewicz, 1996).

Other emotional difficulties reported by the participants included, withdrawn behaviors and problems with trusting others, as indicated with Earlene's three children. Earlene felt that her children were afraid to get close to others for fear of abandonment. Her belief was that her children had lost her because of her incarceration and were

afraid that anyone else they would get close to would also be taken away. Earlene's children experienced a very traumatic event in the murder of their father by their mother and then the incarceration of their mother. These events likely contributed to some post-traumatic stress reaction which could result in emotional problems.

These noted emotional difficulties describe symptoms that are indicative of possible disorders. When these symptoms occur for extended periods of time a specific diagnosis of an emotional disorder could likely occur and should be addressed (Koplewicz, 1996). In this case perhaps some behavior therapy would be beneficial because of its direct supportive quality. Behavior therapy is the type of psychotherapy that is highly recommended with children and adolescents; it targets specific symptoms and aims to set goals for minimizing those symptoms. The ultimate goal is to improve the child's ability to function (Koplewicz, 1996). This type of psychotherapy is also good for children who may exhibit specific behavior problems.

The literature describes both externalizing and internalizing behavioral difficulties in children of incarcerated mothers. Internalizing behaviors are more likely to be viewed in the realm of depression and anxiety because of the withdrawn, inward nature of internalizing behaviors. Internalizing behaviors typically are not disruptive of others activities (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). On the other end of the spectrum are externalizing behaviors which are more overt and are characterized by disruptive behaviors such as displays of aggression, fighting, hostility to siblings and peers and other acting-out behaviors (Johnston, 1995). These are behaviors most likely to be indicated in children with behavioral issues.

The behavioral difficulties described by the participants while they were separated from their children included both internalizing types of behaviors that tended to overlap with some of the emotional problems described by the mothers in this study, and externalizing behaviors such as the physical aggression among siblings as indicated by Beverly regarding her sons. Aggression toward peers was another behavioral issue described by Carmen regarding her daughter. Carmen's daughter displayed significant aggression toward the other children at her Head Start classroom and in kindergarten. Her behavior difficulties were so severe that it interfered with her learning. She was retained in kindergarten and continued to have some behavior issues. Carmen noted, "I think she has a lot of anger in her because I was gone for so long."

Darla described verbally aggressive behaviors in her son and daughter. Aggression can manifest as either verbal or physical harm to another. Verbal aggression includes such behaviors as arguing, name-calling, and verbally threatening others (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Darla's description of her children's actions would suggest verbally aggressive behavior. She reported, "They became very belligerent and angry. They would cuss at people." Darla's indications were that her children would use profanity in an angry manner at her and others.

In addition to the social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties the mothers in this study described in their children, they also indicated educational difficulties ranging from a drop in grades to truancy. All schools have certain educational expectations for students regarding their performance and recognize the importance of education in human development. Children who have learning problems and other educational

difficulties typically do not meet those expectations. Children who have an incarcerated mother are more likely than their peers to experience educational difficulties. They demonstrate poor academic performance, failing grades, extensive absences from school, and a higher dropout rate than their peers (Sacks et al. 1997). They also have difficulty concentrating and maintaining their motivation in school (Kampfner, 1995).

The educational difficulties described by the participants in this research depict a range of problems among their children that are similar to those reported in the literature. Most of the children experienced some adverse impact on their educational functioning. Anna's children experienced a decline in their academic performance. They were not failing but the decline in performance was profound enough to be recognizable in their grades.

Some of the educational difficulties described by the participants seemed related to other areas of problematic functioning such as the aggressive and noncompliant behaviors at school seen in Carmen's daughter. Educational difficulties often occur along with school behavior problems. Underachievement in school is an educational problem that has also been described as a school behavior problem because underachievers are usually also deficient in a broad spectrum of behaviors such as attending to the assigned task or remaining seated (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Carmen's daughter was retained in kindergarten due to a lack of adequate educational progress. She was also suspected of having some form of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

One of Beverly's twin sons refused to speak at school and was provided with speech and language services. He would not respond to his teacher but he would talk with Beverly at home. His lack of responsiveness has many possible explanations including, the side effect of the traumatic experience of having his mother incarcerated or severe anxiety. It is possible that the two separations from his mother contributed to some significant anxiety that prevented him from being able to function in a verbally appropriate fashion at school. His failure to speak at school, even though he had the ability to do so adversely affected his classroom performance.

Darla's children also experienced multiple separations from their mother and manifest educational difficulties similar to other adolescents experiencing this type of separation. Her son was truant from school and eventually dropped out and even though her daughter was in attendance, she was unable to concentrate well enough to achieve adequately. She enrolled in a cosmetology program but was also unsuccessful with that. Adolescent children of incarcerated mothers are more apt to be connected to deviant and delinquent peer subcultures and less connected to school (Dallaire, 2006).

### ***Summary***

Since perceptions help with the identification of a problem (Henriques, 1982) and parents often feel their children's hurt as keenly as their own (McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978), the perceptions of the mothers in this study can be believed to be accurate when describing the social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties in their children. Each mother recognized problems in her child and/or children that became apparent during their term of incarceration.

## ***Research Question 2***

*What are the perceptions of previously incarcerated mothers regarding their incarceration and any social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties their children experienced since reunification?*

Upon completion of their terms of incarceration and/or furloughs and meeting any other necessary requirements, all the participants were reunited with their children. All the mothers were taking an active role in the lives of their children at the time of their interview. Even when the mothers returned to live with other family members who were previously caring for their children, they immediately began the process of providing the maternal care. In response to question two, the mothers did perceive that their children continued to experience some social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties after their reunification.

Reunification for mothers and their children as soon as possible is of prime importance; however reunification does not mean the extinction of difficulties experienced by the children. After children are reunited with their mothers they may continue to experience difficulties for years after their mothers' arrest and incarceration (Kampfner, 1995). The children may continue to have symptoms of depression, problems with concentration, difficulty sleeping, poor school performance, withdrawal, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Young & Smith). For some of the participants in this research, the reunification process was very painful as well as joyful. For all the participants it was a blessing to have their freedom and to be back with their children and families again.

Anna returned home to an excellent support system. Her mother, her husband, and her pastor were on hand to help with the transition. Even with these supports in place however, Anna indicated that her children continued to have some difficulties. Her son continued to require some educational assistance and complain of headaches and stomach aches. Socially, her daughter continued to restrict her social activities outside of church and spent most of her leisure time at home. Emotionally, she continued to appear depressed and expressed fear that something else might happen to Anna.

Beverly returned to live with her mother and also had an immediate support system in place for herself and her sons. Her sons continued to have some behavioral difficulties. She reported, "They still fight with each other." This fighting appeared to be more severe than normal sibling rivalry disputes. One of her twin boys continues to be very quiet and unable to handle stressful situations. He continues to engage in repetitive behaviors like rocking himself and sucking his thumb. He also continues to receive the educational supports at school for his lack of responsiveness.

Carmen's daughter continued to experience difficulties after their reunification. Initially, she was nonresponsive to Carmen. She refused to eat any food prepared for her by Carmen and developed eating problems. She continued to have social and behavior problems at school; she had problems getting along with the other children because of her physical aggression. Her lack of academic progress resulted in her retention in kindergarten and a subsequent referral for an evaluation. There are additional concerns with Carmen's daughter surrounding the possibility of a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and the need for an evaluation.

Darla's children experienced two previous separations from her due to incarceration, more than any of the other children. Her children were teenagers at the time of her last incarceration and were at an age when children tend to reject limits placed on their behavior by adults, especially children of incarcerated mothers (Johnston, 1995; Myers et al., 1999). Her son resisted her promptings for him to stay in school. He dropped out of school and began to associate with what Darla described as a "bad bunch." He became involved in drug activity and was stealing from family members. Darla even indicated that she put herself in danger by "going out in the streets to get him." Darla voiced concern that her son was beginning to live the same type of lifestyle that led to her incarcerations. "He was stealing stuff from the family so he had to find someplace else to live and I was really worried about him." Darla appeared to struggle with reestablishing a relationship with her children. Her daughter was unable to focus in school and blamed Darla for the rape she experienced while they were separated. She continued to have poor relationships with coworkers and was verbally aggressive to others on her jobs and to Darla. Darla also insinuated that her children tried to make her feel guilty for being away from them. She was giving her children large sums of money and noted that, "I felt like I was paying them for being away from them." Earlene too, was sensitive to her children's needs. She often voiced concern about her children and felt that they had suffered greatly as a result of being separated from her on three different occasions.

Earlene's children, like the other children in this research also continued to experience some adverse impact of being separated from their mother during her term



of incarceration. Earlene reported that upon reunification with her children, “There were a lot of trust issues.” She spoke of how she and her three children slept together for months after their reunification because they were afraid to be away from her. She noted that her children were scared for a long time once they were reunited and that she had to reestablish the mother-child bond with them. It was very perceptive of Earlene to realize that even though her children were not infants or toddlers when they were separated from her, there had nonetheless been an important bond broken between them that needed to be repaired. Earlene was also fortunate to have re-entry services to assist her with her children after their reunification. She did indicate that she felt her children were now doing better.

All the children of the previously incarcerated mothers in this study displayed a range of difficulties that could be described as social, emotional, behavioral, and/or educational after they were reunited. The mothers in this study indicated that they perceived difficulties in their children during the time they were incarcerated that continued to be present when they returned home. For some children interventions were in place to assist with difficulties they were continuing to experience such as the counseling, tutoring and moral support Anna’s children receive from their church and the services provided to Beverly’s son at school.

The mothers in this study were perceptive about the difficulties their children were experiencing as well as the fact that their children had needs beyond basic shelter and care. These mothers also recognized the need for their children to have some source of assistance for their difficulties.

## **Summary**

Each mother described what she perceived to be social, emotional, behavioral and/or educational difficulties in her child and/or children that continued upon their reunification. The difficulties the mother noted during their internment were also evident when they regained custody of their children. Some of the mothers had good support systems in place when they returned home which helped to mitigate the difficulties their children experienced. For the majority of the children discussed by their mothers in this study the supports were not as solid and the children experienced greater difficulties.

### ***Research Question 3***

*What are mother's perceptions regarding the types of interventions that could have been beneficial to their children in experiencing less social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties?*

Each of the mothers interviewed had participated in some type of reentry program either before being reunited with their child and/or children or during the process of regaining custody and living with them again. During the process of obtaining services such as counseling, housing assistance and transportation for their own needs these mothers also realized that their children had a variety of needs including physical and psychological that required some form of assistance. As they worked to build a new and better life for themselves after incarceration they wanted the same for their children. All the participants indicated that their children could have gained benefit from some type of assistance with their difficulties even if they were unsure of what type of

assistance was needed. Various interventions were mentioned including individual counseling and/or group counseling by a licensed social worker or counselor, where the children could talk about their feelings, spiritual guidance and support from one's own pastor and church family, big brother mentoring, and father support in the absence of the mother.

Anna maintained a strong spiritual influence in her life and for her children. She indicated that her church provided a variety of services for her children and her during her absence and upon her return home. Anna's belief was that Christian counseling was the best thing for her children because it could give them a foundation (The Bible) for how to best deal with problems they encounter in life. Anna's children received a variety of services from her church. Her church offered youth groups, a mentoring center and tutoring. Other than the services provided by her church, Anna did not feel her children needed any other assistance.

Not all the mothers were as fortunate as Anna to have such a variety of services available to them or the network of individuals to help deliver those services. Not all the mother had the wherewithal to know how to access available services for their children.

Beverly's twin sons did not get any type of counseling or other assistance while she was incarcerated. She also recounted how her one son did not get any assistance when he first started having difficulties at school. When he did begin to receive assistance she believed that it was good for his school problems, but felt that her son also needed to have their father involved in their lives. The twin's father was not involved in Beverley's life or in the lives of his sons.

Carmen's daughter did not receive any assistance with her difficulties until after they were reunited. She was aware of the behavioral problems she experienced in Head Start and kindergarten because of the reports from her grandmother, but it wasn't until after Carmen returned home that some assistance was received. As a result of her involvement in the re-entry program Carmen felt that she had a greater awareness of what her daughter might need in the way of assistance with her difficulties. Carmen indicated,

Now that I'm working with the group in re-entry I have learned more about what could be available for her and for me. Maybe even a group like the group in re-entry. If the women in group get help from talking about our problems then I think it would be good for kids to have something like that too. Maybe it would help her be less angry and talk about what's bothering her. I think the counseling would be good for her.

Similar to the other participants in this research, Darla's children did not receive any type of assistance during the time she was incarcerated. She reported, "They didn't get any kind of help. I think if they had had somebody to talk to they would have been better." Darla's family was available to care for her children in her absence, but no professional help was provided. She noted that when she came home she tried to convince her children to get some assistance, but they refused to get any type of help for their difficulties. She was not able to convince them that they should receive some professional counseling.

Earlene was the only mother who had visitations with her children during her incarceration and she felt that this was beneficial for them. However, her children did not receive any professional assistance such as counseling or crisis intervention until she

returned home. Earlene believed that the counseling her children received was the most helpful thing for them aside from her return home.

### ***Summary***

Each mother perceived some form of social, emotional, behavioral, and/or educational difficulty in her child and/or children and reported that they could benefit from some form of assistance and/or intervention. Most of the children however, did not receive any form of assistance while their mother was incarcerated. Upon reunification all the mothers recognized the need for their children to receive some form of assistance for their difficulties. For a majority of the mothers counseling appeared to be the intervention of choice.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations to this study are important to consider. First because the participants were reporting on sensitive information in their lives and the lives of their children it is possible that due to unease or embarrassment they were reticent about revealing some information. Secondly, this research study, like most reporting on the impact of maternal incarceration on the children left behind has the limitation of having to rely on reports from the mothers on her child's outcomes. This is especially true regarding the information the mothers discussed about the time of their internment. The mothers had limited contact with their children and had to depend on reports from the caregivers regarding the status of their children.

The small sample size in this study also poses a limitation. While the sample representation of African American mothers is important because the majority of

incarcerated mothers are African American and their stories need to be heard, a larger sample size is more desirable.

The individual bias of the researcher is also a limitation in this research on an important level. My status as an African American woman stirred my interest to document the disparate degree of persecution and incarceration of African American women and the negative impact it has on their children.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS**

#### **Recommendations**

The hidden ramifications of maternal incarceration are now not so hidden. The reports of the mothers in this study are consistent with other studies (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Johnston, 1995; Myers et al., 1999; Mumola, 2000; Dallaire, 2007) on the adverse impact on a child when separated from a mother due to incarceration. The mothers consistently perceive difficulties in their children that became apparent after their incarceration. Based on the findings of this study, I offer the following recommendations to those who work with children and have the heart to listen and act.

First, perhaps the most important recommendation is to have some viable alternative to incarceration for women who have young children and are imprisoned for nonviolent crimes. Since the majority of women who are incarcerated are there for crimes involving drugs, some alternative to mandatory sentences that addresses the substance abuse issue must be implemented. Mandatory minimum sentences virtually eliminate other options to incarceration that would be less expensive and more effective than harsh punishment such as half-way houses that require the participants

to submit to regular drug screening and allow the women to be in their communities as contributing members of society. These programs would ideally provide treatment and counseling for possible issues that may have led to the substance abuse. This would also include involvement in re-entry programs that provide supportive services for housing, education, job and skills training, child care and health care. These are some of the best ways to keep more women from being incarcerated and reduce the negative impact on the children left behind.

Secondly, the children affected by maternal incarceration should be provided with interventions early in the separation from their mother that include individual, group and family counseling designed to deal with the fact of the mother's incarceration and provide the children with a feeling of connectedness to others. Interventions are necessary so that the children of incarcerated mothers do not replicate the patterns of criminogenic behaviors seen in their mothers. This is a significant societal problem because children with an incarcerated mother are six times more likely than their peers to be incarcerated and have higher rates of delinquent behaviors as seen in the adolescent son of one of the participants in this study. Hopefully these types of interventions will provide the children with a sense of connectedness to non-delinquent peers, family and school.

Next, there is an urgent need for interdisciplinary collaborative work and communication among the different agencies and the individuals within these agencies to provide services for children of incarcerated mothers. This would include social workers, psychologists, school personnel, and criminologists all coming together to



assess the unique needs of these children. Since there is no specific agency responsible for keeping track of children of incarcerated mothers the children often go ignored and their needs go unmet. As part of this interdisciplinary collaboration there could be pre-service training for entry-level counselors, school psychologists, social workers and administrators to be educated regarding the characteristics and special needs of children of incarcerated mothers.

A fourth recommendation would be to provide a way for incarcerated mothers and their children to have quality contact during the term of their incarceration. Mothers and their children need to have quality visits in an environment that is not threatening to the children. They need to see that their mother is alright even if she is away from them. The mothers likewise need to know that their children are alright and receiving needed services, interventions, and care.

Programs to provide incarcerated mothers and their children a way to maintain the mother-child bond and address the multiple needs of the children left behind are essential. Engelbert (2001) suggests that children of incarcerated mothers sustain severe emotional trauma and the only way to minimize this trauma is through frequent contact and visitation with the mother. However, because most incarcerated women are housed far from their children, visits are often rare.

Several states have recognized the need for incarcerated mothers and their children to have frequent and on-going contact. Huie (1993) noted that,

Until recently, officials didn't recognize that prison walls don't stop a child's love and emotional dependence for his or her imprisoned mother. Now, attitudes are changing, and correctional institutions are

establishing programs to help meet the special needs of inmate parents and their families (p. 3).

One longstanding program, in existence since 1978, is The Prison MATCH Program (Mothers and Their Children) (Huie, 1993). The Prison MATCH Program is a parent-child visitation program located in correctional facilities across the country. The program provides a child-oriented, relaxed environment for mothers and their children to spend time together. The visiting areas are filled with stuffed animals, games, doll houses, books and other items for the children. Mothers can also have lunch with their children. Children are allowed to visit with their mothers for up to four hours once a week (Huie, 1993; Reed & Reed, 1997). The program administrators indicate that the program helps mothers and their children form an emotional bond that contributes to later family stability and responsible parenting (Huie, 1993).

Another intervention, The Community Prison Mother-Infant Care Program, is a program that offers an option to mother-infant separation by providing live-in prison nurseries (Huie, 1993). This program, provided in New York at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, Taconic Correctional Facility and Rose M. Singer Jail and at the Houston House in Massachusetts, allows mothers and their infants to live together until the child's first birthday. The program also includes parenting classes. The mothers report that the program increases the mother-child bonding and improved their parenting skills. Additionally, the women involved in the program had fewer reports of misconduct and decreased rates of recidivism (Huie, 1993; Reed & Reed, 1997; Parke & Stewart, 2002).

New York has had prison nursery programs like the one described above for over a century (Huie, 1993); other states are recognizing the importance of keeping incarcerated moms and their newborns together. There are only five other states that offer such programs. Since 2001, The Ohio Reformatory for Women has operated the Achieving Baby Care Success program, an in-house nursery that enables mothers to raise their children in their cells (Inskeep, 2008). In 1999 the state of Washington established a prison nursery program at the Washington Corrections Center for Women. The California Institution for Women in Corona, California, has operated a prison nursery for more than two years. Nebraska started its prison nursery program in 1994 at the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women (Ghose, 2002). Indiana was the sixth state to establish a prison nursery program. In 2008, The Wee One's Nursery began operating at the Indiana Women's Prison (Gormsen, 2008).

These programs, established in recent years, benefit the child, the mother and society as a whole. They allow the children to bond with the mother and contribute to reducing the harms the children suffer. West Virginia is the next state preparing to begin a prison nursery program (Kusmer, 2008).

If the ideal situation were to exist in regard to services for incarcerated women and their children, I would like to see what I would call full-service facilities, where instead of providing state-of-the-art repression, our government would provide state-of-the-art rehabilitation. While the women would still serve their sentences, they would live in quarters that are equipped like an apartment for mothers and children. The children would live full-time with the mothers, attend school, receive counseling and

participate in a variety of activities designed to support their growth and development and increase their chances for success. The mothers would be required to participate in educational and job training activities and would be allowed to be employed outside the facility. They would be responsible for providing the care for their children and would attend counseling together to help both the mothers and the children get past the negative stigma, the shame of incarceration and the secrecy that often goes along with that shame. Since this type of facility does not yet exist more services must be provided to women currently housed in traditional facilities that will allow more contact with their children. Services such as free transportation for children to travel to prison facilities to visit their mothers. There should also be a residential facility where the children could spend the weekend with their mothers and enjoy activities together in colorful and inviting family areas. These connections can often make the difference between successful reentry and recidivism.

Interventions such as these are less expensive than incarceration and could help eliminate some of the big business profits of the prison industrial complex. There is a gouging of prisoners with exorbitant cost for things such as phone calls home to their children and other family members and for personal items. All these recommendations serve as a valuable mechanism for providing assistance to incarcerated mothers and their children. However, the primary issues are being overlooked. There needs to be a way to address the social concerns that drive women to commit crimes in the first place. These are only band-aid approach to a much larger problem.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Now that a number of children who experienced maternal incarceration have reached an age of majority, research needs to be completed with this population in order to obtain their perspective of any difficulties they suffered as a result of the forced separation from their mother due to incarceration. It is imperative that researchers interview these adult children and obtain direct information from them and not continue to rely on the reports of the mothers of these children. This is the logical framework for future studies on this population of children. Additional studies with this population could examine the career paths chosen by the adult children of incarcerated mothers to determine if their choices of careers were influenced by their mothers' incarceration.

Interviewing mothers who have completed the re-entry process and have been out of prison for a longer period of time could also provide valuable information on the functioning of both previously incarcerated mothers and their children.

A study of children who were placed in foster care rather than being cared for by a family member during their mothers' incarceration would provide another view on the outcomes of children of incarcerated mothers. This could lead to greater support for kinship care for all children separated from a parent or provide the impetus for quality foster care. In addition, examining the resiliency of this population and what contributes to the resiliency for one child as compared to another could enhance the body of literature on children with an incarcerated mother.

Another area of research could examine the various kinds of community supports that are offered to previously incarcerated mothers and their children through ministries. Examining the role faith plays in the lives of these mothers and their rehabilitation would be interesting and possibly provide additional support for Christian counseling as an intervention for mothers and their children.

An investigation into the issue of the big business of prisons, the growth in the number of prisons being built in the United States to house female inmates, and the exploitation of prisoners for cheap labor for a variety of businesses should be examined. There may be factors revealed in such studies that could reduce the number of women who are required to serve sentences in residential facilities.

The recent changes in the mandatory minimum sentencing requirements have been in place for almost one year now. Research to examine how these legislative changes affect the rate of incarceration of women in general and mothers in particular will be important.

Another potential area for research would include examining the use of technology to keep mothers and their children connected. The use of video connections such as webcams could prove beneficial to providing another way for incarcerated mothers and their children to have contact.

Finally, since most children of incarcerated mothers are of school age it is important that educators are aware of this fragile population of children. A survey of school counselors, school administrators, teachers, and school psychologist about their

knowledge of the needs of children of incarcerated mothers can help provide necessary training and resources for addressing the needs of the children.

### **Conclusions**

The prison system was originally designed with the idea of the male criminal in mind (Chesney-Lind, 2002); however, the advent of mass incarceration in response to the war on drugs and the racialized use of incarceration as a response to a social problem has had a particularly heavy toll on women in general and African American women specifically (Chesney-Lind, 2002), and consequently on their children as well. Harsher punishment for crack cocaine than powdered cocaine use has also landed more Black women in prison for longer sentences than Caucasian women.

The growth of the United States penal system has had a profound effect on women and the children these women leave behind. Thousands of children are separated from their mothers each year and left to be raised by grandparents, aunts, other family and friends or warehoused in foster homes. Most times the children are unable to have any visits with the incarcerated mother which deeply disrupts the mother-child bond. These children experience a range of social, emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties. Some of these children drift into delinquency and drug use others become angry and self- destructive or withdrawn.

Each year the number of incarcerated women continues to rise. Most recently, between midyear 2005 and 2006, the female prison population increased by 4.8% to reach 111,403 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). These women are often being incarcerated not as a response to a female crime problem but in response to the

dynamics of a war on drugs. This increase in female incarceration rates is a major contributor to the growth nationally in the prison population. A vast majority of those women are mothers to children under the age of 18 years. There is limited knowledge about what happens to children of incarcerated mothers. There is no agency, not the police, the courts or the prisons, responsible for monitoring what becomes of the children. Even the so called front-line systems such as the public schools, child welfare and juvenile justice are not required to inquire about or account for parental incarceration (Bernstein, 2004). Those children will no doubt suffer the adverse consequences of separation from the major caregiver in their lives. This body of research will hopefully shed light on the suffering children experience as a result of forced separation because of an over reliance on incarceration in our country.

### **Reflections**

During the course of more than 25 years as an educator I have repeatedly come in contact with children who have an incarcerated mother. Some are resilient because they have an enormous support system, while others are not as fortunate. Those less fortunate children struggle in many of the social, emotional, behavioral and educational ways discussed in this research and often times become self destructive. Children of incarcerated mothers face very difficult circumstances and receive very limited assistance. Their difficulties including separation from the primary caregiver, lives of poverty and academic failure are all precursors for developing psychopathology and engaging in criminal activity (Dallaire, 2006).



This fragile population of children are often ignored by the judicial system, overlooked by the social systems and misidentified in schools. Having a mother incarcerated carries with it a greater risk for a number of harms in childhood and adolescence. I think it is past time for us to be proactive instead of reactive and to be prescriptive rather than continuing to just describe the problem. Frederick Douglas once said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men" (Dallaire, 2006). We must provide children with the necessary assistance early in the separation from their mothers so we are not attempting to repair broken men or women.

### **Good News**

On Monday December 10th, 2007 the Supreme Court of the United States attempted to address the issue of the disparity in sentencing between crack cocaine and powdered cocaine by instructing district courts to read the United States Sentencing Guidelines as "effectively advisory". Previously the guidelines were mandatory and called for a stricter sentence for individuals possessing crack cocaine. An individual possessing more than 50 grams of crack cocaine with the intent to distribute is subject to a sentence of ten years to life, while an individual possessing more than 50 grams of powder cocaine is subject to a sentence of zero to twenty years. Due to these harsh guidelines and the fact that crack cocaine was a poor man's or poor woman's drug, in this case, the sentence was ten times greater than the sentence for powder cocaine, and our country's War on Drugs became what some call a War on Poor Black Women (Sokoloff, 2005). This has caused a ripple effect throughout our society that has greatly influenced the healthy development of a generation of children. Because courts often

consider poor Black women less fit to be mothers they are more likely to confine them to prison. In the American court system race, class and gender often have devastating effects in determining the sentences these women receive and how it impacts their children.

With the Supreme Court's decision late last year the hope is that judges will now have some discretion in how they apply mandatory minimum sentences and that those sentences will be less racially disproportionate. Perhaps our country will begin to see a reduction in the rate of incarceration of women due to this war on drugs. Perhaps our country is beginning to realize that incarceration is not the answer to the social problems we face as a society. Perhaps fewer poor Black women will be caught up in the mandatory sentencing problems our country has faced since the 1980's when it began the war on drugs. The Human Rights Watch (2000) notes that, The racially disproportionate nature of the war on drugs is not just devastating to Black Americans. It contradicts faith in the principles of justice and equal protection of the laws that should be the bedrock of any constitutional democracy; it exposes and deepens racial fault lines that continue to weaken the country and belies its promise as a land of equal opportunity; and it undermines faith among races in the fairness and efficacy of the criminal justice system.

There may finally be hope on the horizon for the riskiest of our country's high risk children. The Winds of Change are a mighty force and for once may be blowing in the favor of these high risk children.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **SAMPLE OF INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

My name is Roberta Treadway Gaston and I am a student at Cleveland State University. I am presently enrolled in the Ph.D. in Urban Education Program. My area of specialization is Learning and Development. I am required to complete a dissertation as one of the requirements to obtain my degree. As part of my research I have chosen to study mother's perceptions regarding the impact of their incarceration on the behavioral, emotional, social and educational functioning of their children. I will be interviewing a number of mothers who have completed their term of incarceration and were separated from their minor children for at least one year and are now living back with their dependent children. The research is important as it will provide the public schools, the justice system and social service agencies with information that will allow the proper recognition of these children. It is also my hope that this body of research will assist in the program planning for both the mothers and their children. The information you provide along with the responses of others will be used to add to the body of knowledge that educators, social workers, counselors and others can draw from to assist the children with whom they work.

I invite you to participate in a short interview with me that should take about 45 minutes. I will ask you a series of questions. There is minimum risk involved. In order to minimize any risk to you I will conduct your interview in a confidential manner. Your confidentiality is very important to me. Your responses will be audiotape recorded: however, your name will not be used in any part of the transcription of the tapes. Any

information that would specifically identify you will be eliminated. The following procedures will help guarantee confidentiality. The tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet or a combination lock safe. They will be destroyed once transcription of the tapes is made. In addition, none of your answers will be shared with anyone outside of this project without your permission. You may withdraw from this project at any time or refuse to answer any questions that you feel are too probing. You will not be asked to answer any questions that might be viewed as incriminating.

If you have any questions, please contact Roberta Treadway-Gaston at (216)752-0026. Signing the form below indicates your interest, time, and willingness to participate in this important research project. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Judy Stahlman at (216) 523-7134 at Cleveland State University if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Thank you for your interest and support,

Roberta Treadway-Gaston

I understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a research participant, I can contact Cleveland State University's Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630. I have the right to keep a copy of this form.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

Please complete the following demographic information to insure that you meet the requirements for this study. Women asked to participate in this research study must meet the following requirements:

African American mothers who lived with their minor children prior to incarceration, were incarcerated and separated from their children, 18 years of age or younger, for at least one year, and had some contact with their children during incarceration. These women must have completed the term of their incarceration and be living back with their dependent children. All mothers participating must be over the age of 18 at the time of her interview.

1. Are you an African American woman who was incarcerated for at least one year?  
\_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no
2. Were you the mother to a minor child under the age of 18 during the term of your incarceration \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no
3. Did you live with your minor children prior to your incarceration?  
\_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no
4. Are you presently living with your minor children?  
\_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no
5. Did you have some contact with your child during the time you were incarcerated?  
\_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no
6. What is your present age?  
19-25\_\_\_\_\_, 26-35\_\_\_\_\_, 36 or older\_\_\_\_\_.

You must be able to answer yes to questions 1-5 in order to participate in the study.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **MOTHERS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

I would like to ask you some questions about your incarceration and how you feel it has affected your life and the lives of your children/child. If you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions let me know and we can move on to the next question.

1. Tell me about the circumstances surrounding your incarceration.
2. While you were incarcerated who cared for your children? How did that arrangement work out?
3. Describe your concerns about their care.
4. What type of information were you able to receive about the care and well-being of your children while you were incarcerated? Who provided you with information?
5. How often were your children able to visit you while you were incarcerated? Describe your visits.
6. How did the visits with your child/children affect your relationship while you were incarcerated?
7. What are your perceptions regarding any social difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, problems with not wanting to spend time with friends or be involved in social activities)?
  - a. What was the nature of those difficulties?
  - b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?
  - c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?
8. What are your perceptions regarding any emotional difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, experiencing nightmares or crying spells)?
  - a. What was the nature of those difficulties?
  - b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?
  - c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?



9. What are your perceptions regarding any behavioral difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, fighting with peers or being defiant to caregiver)?
  - a. What was the nature of those difficulties?
  - b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?
  - c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?
10. What are your perceptions regarding any educational difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example referral to a school psychologist or counselor)?
  - a. What was the nature of those difficulties?
  - b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?
  - c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?
11. Tell me about your reunification with your child/children. Describe any social, emotional, behavioral or educational difficulties they have experienced since your return home? What type of assistance are they receiving for these difficulties?

## APPENDIX D

### SAMPLE OF MOTHER'S INTERVIEWS

#### *Mother's Interviews*

##### ***Mother #1 (Anna)***

Q1: Tell me about the circumstances surrounding your incarceration.

Anna: Well there were a couple of things that happened. I was in a car accident and had a lot of back pain. The doctors gave me muscle relaxers and pain medication to help and I had physical therapy. I went back to work after about two months. I was an RN on a surgical floor, and you know, I gave patients their meds and I started taking their pain meds and using them for my back pain. One day I had taken a couple of oxycotin before I went to work. Then when I got to work I was suppose to give a patient her meds but I was taking the patient's meds and I got caught. I had been doing it for almost a year. I know now that they were watching me because my behaviors changed. It was almost a year after my accident. I was really out of control. I even wrote some illegal prescriptions.

Q2: While you were incarcerated who cared for your children?

Anna: I was married at the time and my mother lived with us and my two children so they both took care of my two kids. I have a 16 year old daughter and a 12 year old son. Both my children are from my first marriage, but they have a good relationship with my husband and he has raised them since they were only six and two. My mother did most of the work, she provided most of the care because my husband worked a lot of overtime and wasn't around as much. I think that was his way of coping with what happened. My mom did a good job of talking to my kids about what happened. She was really my rock. She made sure the kids got to school and church and all their activities. I didn't worry a lot about their care because I knew they were being well cared for. I knew my husband would provide for them financially and my mom would make sure they were well cared for. She only worked part-time. That's how I got the job I have now.

Q3: Describe your concerns about their care.

Anna: Like I said before, I was concerned but I knew that my mother and my husband would take care of my children. As a mother you always think that no one can take care of your children better than you can, so I still worried about them. My biggest concern was how they would deal with school and their

friends. Children can be very mean to each other and we lived in a small town where everybody knows everybody else. People in town know what happened, the accident and everything, but the kids don't understand and they can be very cruel. I also worried that I wouldn't be there to take care of them if they got sick. Since I was a nurse I would always be the one to take care of them if they were ill. I really hated not being there when they were sick, even if it was just a bad cold.

Q4: What type of information were you able to receive about the care and well-being of your children while you were incarcerated? Who provided you with that information?

Anna: My mother usually kept me well informed about how my daughter and son were doing and my husband. My mom would come visit with her friend from her job. He would drive her down about once a month the whole time I was down there. My husband came to visit too and he always brought a picture of the kids that he would take with his digital camera. Between the two of them and talking with the kids occasionally, I was able to stay pretty well informed about what was going on with my kids.

Q5: How often were your children able to visit you while you were incarcerated? Describe your visits.

Anna: My children did not visit me while I was incarcerated. I did not want them to see me there. I just didn't think it was good for them.

Q6: How did the visits with your children affect your relationship while you were incarcerated?

Anna: My children wanted to come visit, but I relied on my mother and my husband to support my decision to keep them at home. When I talked with my kids and when I wrote to them I tried to explain why I didn't want them in that environment. They did alright with it. I know it was hard because I didn't get to see them for over a year but they were OK.

Q7: What are your perceptions regarding any social difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, problems with not wanting to spend time with friends or be involved in social activities).

Q7a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q7b. What type of assistance did they receive for those difficulties?

Q7c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Anna: Well, my son played in a community football and basketball league and he continued to be involved in those activities without any problem. He didn't have any problems with his friends in his sports. Most of the boys were from the neighborhood and school and he still went to birthday parties and places like Cedar Point. He seemed pretty much alright. But my daughter, she used to like to have me take her and a couple of her friends to the mall. We would pick up my niece and I would take them to the mall to shop or sometime we would see a movie. My sister would go with us sometime when she wasn't working. It was nice. But when I was incarcerated she wouldn't go out, not even if my sister and my niece offered to take her. She wouldn't sleep over at my sister's and she stopped having her friends sleep over. She stayed at home with my mom a lot. My mom told me that she would talk on the phone with friends and her cousin and she would email them, but she seldom went anywhere except for church or church activities. She and her cousin used to be inseparable, they are only 6 months apart in age and they grew up together, but while I was away, she didn't spend much time with her. I think her church activities kept her pretty stable. With the family all being involved, I think that was the best thing for her and my son. My mom had my children in counseling with our church and they still participate. I really think this is good because they see these people at church every week and they trust them. I think that the counseling is the best thing especially since its Christian counseling. They can talk about how the Bible would have them deal with things that are difficult for them.

Q8: What are your perceptions regarding any emotional difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, experiencing nightmares or crying spells)?

Q8a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q8b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?

Q8c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Anna: Well, as far as emotional problems are concerned, I think my daughter may have been depressed while I was away. My mom said that she cried a lot at first and slept a lot too. She would come home from school and go to bed, get up, eat and go back to bed. My son seemed to have problems where he just didn't feel well at school a lot. He would go to the clinic at school and they would call my mom. He complained about stomach aches and headaches. I think it was mostly emotional. Since I've been home he still does it sometimes but not as much. I think he just needs to know that I am really home. Sometimes the nurse will let me talk to him and he'll go back to class. We've taken him to his pediatrician and she says he's alright physically. So I think it is more emotional than anything else. My mom kept my kids involved in our church which has a counseling ministry run by social workers who are

members of the church. They have youth groups and adult groups. Our faith is very important and I think keeping them involved in the church was really good for them.

Q9: What are your perceptions regarding any behavioral difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, fighting with peers or being defiant to caregiver)?

Q9a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q9b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?

Q9c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Anna: My kids never really had any serious fights or anything like that or behavior problems. I think most of their difficulties were like emotional, with their feelings. My son had a couple of verbal altercations with a peer of his who he has known since he was 4 years old. They never have gotten along. It's mainly verbal stuff, but one time it became physical and both boys got put off the school bus for three days. After that my husband started taking him to school. Since I've been home he hasn't had any problems. My daughter would sometimes get angry and talk back and she still does. I think it's more a factor of that mother-daughter teenager thing and I think she is still a little angry at me for the time I was away from her. I try to spend more time with her and explain that it was a mistake in judgment for me to do what I did and that I was wrong. I also explain to both my children that I paid for my mistake and learned from it and I don't plan on repeating it or being incarcerated ever again. They worked with the counseling center at my church for all our family needs. The counselors there are really good. There is a mentoring center and tutors. There are also classes on computers and how to improve your finances. There are lots of resources there if you choose to take advantage of them

Q10: What are your perceptions regarding any educational difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, referral to a school psychologist or counselor)?

Q10a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q10b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?

10c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Anna: The main educational difficulty was with my son mainly because he was constantly feeling sick at school. He spent a lot of time in the clinic with headaches and stomach aches. His grades went down because he wasn't able to keep up with making up his work. He still goes to the clinic at school complaining about stomach aches. His grades are better now because I have a tutor from the church working with him. He never saw a counselor at school or

a psychologist. They did have an assistant in the class that worked with small groups of kids and he liked that. He still works in those groups for his math. I think that both the church tutoring and the extra help at school is the best thing for him and he's doing better now. My daughter has always been on the Honor Roll and still does well in school. Her grades went down just a little but she was still able to stay on the Honor Roll. She does very well in math and wants to be an architect.

Q11: Tell me about your reunification with your child/children. Describe any social, emotional, behavioral, or educational difficulties they have experienced since your return home? What type of assistance are they receiving for these difficulties?

Anna: Well I was away for a little more than a year and I came back to my home. My husband came to pick me up and when I got home my mother and kids were waiting for me. We had a wonderful dinner together and later that evening we met with one of the elders and my pastor from my church. They came to my home for prayer with the whole family. It was good to have that support. Other than the difficulties I have already told you about, my kids are doing pretty good. My daughter still likes to stick close to home and doesn't go out much. I think she is still a little depressed and scared that something else might happen to me. My son still goes to the clinic at school more than we would like but his grades are improving with the help he gets at school and I will keep them involved with the activities at my church, but other than that I don't think we need any other help. The counseling center at our church is excellent and they are all licensed professionals.

## **Mother #2 (Beverly)**

Q1: Tell me about the circumstances surrounding your incarceration.

Beverly: This was my second incarceration because of drug involvement. The first time was for possession and trafficking and I got out on probation after I did three years. When I got out I went back to my mom's house. I lived there before I was incarcerated with my twin boys. They were almost four years old the first time I went to Trumbull. I stayed clean for almost three years then I started staying at my boyfriend's house sometime and hanging out with some of his friends and using again and got caught up in the life again. I was smoking a lot and even when I didn't have money to buy my own crack, someone else in their house had some. One day we were all sitting around getting high and this other female that was there became angry at me and we got into a fight and I cut her up pretty bad. She had to get stitches in her face, her neck, her hands, her chest, and she almost bled to death. I was convicted of a fourth degree

felony, aggravated assault and did 15 months back at Trumbull Correctional Institution.

Q2: While you were incarcerated who cared for your children? How did that arrangement work out?

Beverly: My mother took care of my boys while I was away I was living in her downstairs apartment before I was incarcerated the first time. My mom has a two family house in the city and her younger sister lived in the downstairs apartment and my mom and my little brother and sister stayed upstairs. I stayed downstairs with my aunt. While I was away my aunt also helped take care of my boys and so did my younger brother good with my boys and everybody was in the same house so they didn't have to go anywhere. I had them when I was really young, I was only 16 and their father has never been involved much.

Q3: Describe your concerns about their care?

Beverly: My mom use to say that no one can take better care of a child than its own mother, because the mother can feel the needs of the child. So I wasn't really worried about or concerned about their care because she is a good mother and grandmother, but her words just always haunted me each time I was away. I knew that my children needed me more than any body else.

Q4: What type of information were you able to receive about the care and well-being of your children while you were incarcerated?

Beverly: Well my mom always let me know what was going on with the boys. I missed a lot of stuff with them like when they started kindergarten. That was something I had always looked forward to. They never had any serious illness or anything, just the usual kid stuff, stomach aches, and colds.

Q5: How often were your children able to visit you while you were incarcerated? Describe your visits.

Beverly: No one came to visit me while I was incarcerated. I got letters and that was it. The first time I was incarcerated my family didn't tell my boys where I was at, they were too young to understand. The second time, I was arrested at home and they were there and knew what happened, but my mother couldn't bring herself to visit or to bring them. So they still didn't really know or understand where I was at.

Q6: How did the visits with your child/children affect your relationship while you were incarcerated?

Beverly: My boys couldn't come visit because my mother wasn't able to afford the visits or get anyone to bring her and the boys to visit.

Q7: What are your perceptions regarding any social difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, problems with not wanting to spend time with friends or be involved in social activities?)

Q7a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q7b. What type of assistance did they receive?

Q7c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Beverly: My boys were pretty young the first time I was incarcerated so they didn't have any problems like that, and this last time they didn't have any problems like that. They took karate classes and they liked that and they still do it now and they still play with the same friends and don't have any problems. Both of them want to learn how to play the saxophone and join the school band.

Q8: What are your perceptions regarding any emotional difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, experiencing nightmares or crying spells)?

Q8a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q8b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?

Q8c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Beverly: I don't know if you would call this an emotional problem or not but \_\_\_\_\_ started sucking his thumb and rocking back and forth. He would sit in a chair and rock himself back and forth while he sucked his thumb. My mother said sometimes he would sit like that and rock for more than an hour. He does it now but it's mainly sucking his thumb. Sometimes I will find him sitting and rocking himself and I don't always know how long he's been doing it. His brother will tease him and sometimes they fight, like all kids, brothers and sisters will fight and argue with each other. They don't fight any other children and they get along with the kids in the neighborhood. \_\_\_\_\_ is more outgoing than \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ is more shy than his brother. He's very quiet and doesn't talk much. He will talk to me more than anyone. I have talked to their doctor about him still sucking his thumb and the rocking and the fact that he doesn't like to talk much. They want to do an evaluation at the clinic. He didn't get any help when he first started having problems. Not while I was away, not really. I think my boys needed to have their dad involved with them, but he wasn't around. My mother did a good job with the boys. She did her best but she wasn't able to get them to counseling or anything like that. I think the help he gets at school is good. They give him speech at school. He has



an IEP for speech. I think they do a good job with him. There are other children with him, maybe three or four. He likes it.

Q9: What are your perceptions regarding any behavioral difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, fighting with peers or being defiant to caregivers)?

Q9a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q9b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?

Q9c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Beverly: Well, I would think that their fighting with each other might be behavioral. It didn't really get like that until I went away the second time. I think they fight too much, but my mom will say that it's just them being boys, you know. He likes to tease his brother about sucking his thumb and will even pull the thumb out of his mouth, then he will hit him and then the fighting starts. They didn't fight when they were young. When I came home from my first incarceration, I noticed that the boys would fight sometimes, but it wasn't like it is now. It got really bad when I was incarcerated the second time. I use to make them have time out in different rooms in the house. They didn't like being away from each other when they were younger so separating them from each other was kind of a punishment too. Now I try to talk to them and take away something like their T.V. I tell them that they should take care of each other instead of fighting with each other. They aren't getting any other kind of help I think it's something that's just here at home. They're still young so I hope it gets better. But I'm going to see about getting them some help. Maybe somebody for them to talk to or something like a big brother since their dad isn't really involved.

Q10: What are your perceptions regarding any educational difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, referral to the school psychologist or counselor)?

Q10a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q10b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?

Q10c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Beverly: He gets the speech help at school because he doesn't like to talk much. He's been getting that for a few years now. He wouldn't speak up in class when the teacher called on him and when he did it would take him a long time to answer. They send a report with his report card to tell me how he's doing. The way the teacher explained it, he works in a small group with other children and they learn how to talk with each other. They answer questions about different things they have learned in the classroom so it helps them answer the teacher

in the class. He says that he likes it and the teacher and I think they do a good job at his school.

Q11: Tell me about your reunification with your child/children. Describe any social, emotional, behavioral, or educational difficulties they have experienced since your return home? What type of assistance are they receiving for these difficulties?

Beverly: Right now it's just what I already told you. My boys still have some problems. I think their problems are mostly emotional and behavioral. They still fight with each other and \_\_\_\_\_ still sucks his thumb and rocks himself. He's very quiet and just doesn't seem to be able to handle anything that is really stressful. He needs to know what is going on and what I am doing all the time. He still doesn't talk much but he talks to me the most. Being home was tough at first because they were not use to me. They always wanted to go to my mom when they needed something and they didn't listen to me the way I wanted them to. It's better now since they see that I am here, living in the same house with them 24/7.

### **Mother #3 (Carmen)**

Q1: Tell me about the circumstances surrounding your incarceration.

Carmen: My problem was always a combination of drugs and alcohol. I started drinking when I was about 16 years old. My mom would drink until she would pass out and when I would get home from school she would be on the couch and I would finish whatever was left in the bottle. She was an alcoholic and stayed in and out of jail for as long as I can remember. I was raised mostly by my grandmother. I started smoking reefer too, sometimes with a little coke. I would steal stuff and sell it to get money. At first it was just small stuff like earrings and make up that I would sell to my friends at school. Then once I graduated I needed more money and I started stealing bigger things. I would get video games, jewelry, leather jackets, purses. I could get anybody just about anything they wanted for the right price. I would con people out of their money and I didn't care as long as I got some money to take care of my habit. I supported myself and my habit like that for about two years before I got caught. I did a total of about 14 months for theft. It was probably the best thing that could have happened. I was always high on something and drinking all the time. My head was never clear and I didn't care about anything.

Q2: While you were incarcerated who cared for your child?

Carmen: My grandmother took care of my daughter. She's all I have and all my daughter has because my mom is in prison now. My daughter was born early and I was

still running the streets so my grandmother let me come back and live with her after she was born. I was incarcerated when she was 3 so my grandmother has been the stable figure in her life.

Q3: Describe your concerns about her care.

Carmen: When I first went to Marysville I didn't think about her much because my head wasn't right and neither was my heart. Then my grandmother wrote to me and told me that the teachers at her Head Start wanted to do some tests because she was having temper tantrums and wasn't getting along with the other children. She wouldn't focus long enough to get things finished. She had a lot of behavior problems. My grandmother felt that she just needed more discipline and she believed in spanking. I don't believe in the old fashion kind of spanking. She never did spank her though. She always said she would but when I would ask her about it she would say she was too tired to chase after her. I use to worry about the two of them being alone, but my grandmother said she liked it that way.

Q4: What type of information were you able to receive about the care and well-being of your child while you were incarcerated?

Carmen: My grandmother let me know what was going on with her Yeah, she let me know. She wrote me couple of times and she let me call home collect. It took awhile before I really had it together enough to care. I would talk to her on the phone sometime, but she didn't know where I was at she just knew that mommy was gone for a little while.

Q5: How often was your child able to visit you while you were incarcerated? Describe your visits.

Carmen: My daughter never came to visit. We talked on the phone a few times and I wrote to her to send her cards and things but no one brought her to visit me. My grandmother wasn't able to do that.

Q6: How did the visits with your child affect your relationship while you were incarcerated?

Carmen: I don't think that not visiting really mattered because she didn't know where I was.

Q7: What are your perceptions regarding any social difficulties your daughter experienced during your incarceration?

Q7a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

- Q7b. What type of assistance did she receive for these difficulties?  
Q 7c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Carmen: Well, I don't really know. I guess she has some social problems because she would fight with the other children at Head Start but I think it was more behavioral and then she really wasn't learning anything because she was always running around and not listening to the teachers. My grandmother would tell me that every day when she would pick her up from school there was a note in her folder about behavior problems, like full blown temper tantrums. She even slapped another little girl when they were playing at school and after that the little girl's mother wouldn't let her come to my grandmother's house to play with her anymore. They lived just a few houses from us. She had a lot of problems like that, especially getting along with the other children. The teachers at Head Start asked my grandmother to have her see a doctor because they wanted to do some testing on her and thought maybe some medication would help her behavior. It wasn't until I came home and she was in kindergarten that they did some testing. That was last year and now she is repeating kindergarten and her behaviors are a little better now. They don't have any kind of counselors at her school and I haven't been able to get her any counseling or anything yet. I think that would be good for her. I think she has a lot of anger in her because I was gone for so long. I don't think she understands that I'm going to be here all the time now.

Q8: What are your perceptions regarding any emotional difficulties your child experienced during your incarceration?

- Q8a. What was the nature of those difficulties?  
Q8b. What type of assistance did she receive for those difficulties?  
Q8c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Carmen: I think the problems she was having with behavior were also some kind of emotional problems too because of me being away from her. They were behavioral and emotional because she was so angry at everybody and at me. I think the emotional part came out in her behavioral, so I guess you could call it emotional behavior, or something like that. She wasn't like this before I started having problems and went away. I guess I should say incarcerated. In reentry they teach you not to minimize what has happened and to be honest about being incarcerated. I think the counseling would be good for her. Now that I'm working with the group in reentry I have learned more about what could be available for her and for me. Maybe even a group like the group in reentry. If the women in group get help from talking about our problems then I think it would be good for kids to have something like that too. Maybe it would help her be less angry and talk about what's bothering her. But I still think it's both behavioral and emotional.

Q9: What are your perceptions regarding any behavioral difficulties your child experienced during your incarceration?

Q9a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q9b. What type of assistance did she receive for those difficulties?

Q9c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Carmen: Well she definitely had behavior problems like I talked about. Her behavior isn't as bad as it use to be but she has problems controlling her anger sometimes. She hasn't had any assistance but I want her to get some kind of counseling because I think that would be good for her. I'm working on it.

Q10: What are your perceptions regarding any educational difficulties your child experienced during your incarceration?

Q10a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q10b. What type of assistance did she receive for those difficulties?

Q10c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Carmen: Oh, she definitely had educational problems because she would not do her work half the time. Sometimes she would refuse to work and the teachers were always writing notes or calling my grandmother or me once I came home. Then her behavior got a little better but she wasn't ready for first grade so she's in kindergarten again this year. I think having her repeat kindergarten is a good thing. They are also going to test her because they think she might have ADHD and I still have to take her to the specialist. The school has done a lot, even Head Start tried but since I was away a lot of things didn't get done. So now that I'm back with my daughter and I'm getting back on my feet I can help her better. I know she still needs a lot of help at school because she still gets angry sometimes and she won't do her work. I know she can do it because she does her work at home but she won't always do it at school. If she thinks it is something that she did already she won't do it again. Like if she did a paper on the letter "R", she will refuse to do another paper on the letter "R". She can't focus on things for a long time when something else is going on around her but at home it's quiet and it's just me and her sitting down to do her work. We don't have the T.V. on or a lot going on. The school gave me some extra worksheets and books to use at home to help her catch up. She still has some problems when we work together but she's getting better. I'm still going to have the evaluation done. I think that will be the best way to go for school. I think if she get counseling that will help with her behavior at school.

Q11: Tell me about your reunification with your child. Describe any social, emotional, behavioral or educational difficulties she experienced since your return home. What type of assistance is she receiving for these difficulties?

Carmen: When I came back I went back to live with my grandmother so it was pretty good because I didn't have to find some place to live. My grandmother told her that I was coming home so she knew I was going to be home. When I got there she was in her room and wouldn't come out. I think she was showing me that she was angry. When she did come out she wouldn't give me a hug and she asked me if I was really her mommy. She told me that her Nana was her mommy. At first she wouldn't eat anything that I fixed for her, nothing, not even a bowl of cereal. She would sit at the table and stare at the food and pick at it. She still has some eating problems and has lost some weight. She won't eat lunch at school either, but she will drink the milk. Even when I pack a lunch she won't eat much of it. She still has the problems at school getting along with some of the kids, but it's not as bad as it was. She has learned that she can't lose control when she becomes upset and angry and hit anyone. I've been working with her to let her know how important kindergarten and school are. I hope to get back in school soon and then we can sit down and do our work together and she can see me study. I don't want her to end up like me and making the kind of mistakes I made. She's a smart little girl and she has a loving personality. I just think that my incarceration was hard on her and she could not put it in words how she was feeling so she just acted out. I think that's why she won't eat what I fix for her. I think she's angry at me and instead of saying so she just won't eat most of what I cook. I'm looking into getting the counseling and the evaluation at school too. Since I started working with re-entry, I'm getting more and more information on places where I can get assistance. I'm also learning more about myself and that has helped me to know how to help my child. It's just taking me a little bit longer than I wanted to get the counseling started.

#### **Mother #4 (Darla)**

Q1: Tell me about the circumstances surrounding your incarceration?

Darla: Actually this was my third time being incarcerated. I was in the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville, Ohio. I was down there for Grand Theft and I had a drug thing. I had some pills on me. When I first went there I had five to ten years on me. That meant I would not be going before the board for four years for parole.

Q2: While you were incarcerated who cared for your children? How did that arrangement work out?

Darla: When I was down there in the penitentiary my family had to take care of my children. So my children, my son and my daughter, they were staying with my mom who had seven other children. My mom, my brothers and my sister all helped. It worked out pretty good because we were already living there with

my mom. My husband had gotten killed so as a result I lived at my mom's house. I had six brothers and a sister who was still living at home and my first husband's mother was helping with my children as well. I also had a friend that my daughter stayed with sometimes too. My mother owned an apartment building with 17 units and my apartment was right next door to hers, so we were already there. There were only three units that weren't occupied by family. I had a brother across the hall and my baby brother was down the hall and he watched out for them. Four of my brothers stayed in the building. My mom bought the building for us. My children had the people in my family watching over them. My mom saved my apartment for me for four years. I was tremendously blessed by my mother. So that's how my son and daughter were staying there.

Q3: Describe your concerns about their care.

Darla: I knew my mom was taking good care of my children but my son went out into the world and I started hearing things about him taking things from the family and they got out with him and I was worried about him having a place to stay. I was praying that he would have some place stable stay. My children went through a lot when I was gone. They didn't know where I was at, they thought I was visiting my sick father. I really never told them I was incarcerated but the other kids knew at school and I found out that the kids picked on them and they got into fights.

Q4: What type of information were you able to receive about the care and well-being of your children while you were incarcerated?

Darla: Actually my mom let me know, she was so great. My mom has never been in jail. She's been working since she was 14. She worked 10, 12, 14 hours a day for us. She has worked her whole life. She and my father separated when I was about 11 and then she went into homemaking. She wrote me every birthday, every holiday, and she sent me Mother's Day cards, everything. She sent me boxes every season. She just really let me know what was going on with the kids and my sisters and brothers and how the family was doing. She was always very encouraging and never judged me. She always said that she hoped I learned my lesson. She let me know about everything, she kept in touch with me and didn't judge me and that blessed me more than anything.

Q5: How often were your children able to visit you while you were incarcerated? Describe your visits.

Darla: None at all. My family did not want my children to know where I was at and I didn't tell them when I talked to them.

Q6: How did the visits with your children affect your relationship while you were incarcerated?

Darla: No visits

Q7: What are your perceptions regarding any social difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, problems with not wanting to spend time with friends or be involved in social activities)?

Q7a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q7b. What type of assistance did they receive for those difficulties?

Q7c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Darla: It seemed to me that they were hanging around people a lot like me, especially my son, he was out there in the streets with the dope boys, socializing with the guys out on the streets. My brothers would tell me about the things he was doing and not going to school right. My brothers and my sister would tell me about my daughter and how my kids were acting angry even with them. I think socially over the time that I was incarcerated my children became very belligerent and very angry and it would come out because they would lash out. They would cuss people out and do things and they would lash out at me and say you haven't always been here. That was the emotional part that came out in their behavior. Both of them were angry at me. They didn't get any kind of help. I think if they had had somebody to talk to they would have been better. My mother was there and my brothers and sister were around but they didn't have anyone professional to talk to.

Q8. What are your perceptions regarding any emotional difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, experiencing nightmares or crying spells)?

Q8a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q8b. What type of assistance did they receive for those difficulties?

Q8c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Darla: My daughter had some emotional problems that my son didn't have because she was sexually abused while I was incarcerated. It was family and she was holding that against me. My daughter said she wanted to kill herself and one time had to go to the emergency room because she took some pills. When I came home I talked to her about seeing somebody and had been directing her to some people with their LISW so she could talk to somebody about it. She didn't want to talk to anybody about it and she was very angry about it. She had some behavior problems behind that and she would lash out at people and cuss people out. She had some problems in school because of it too. It made



her not be able to think at school, but she did graduate and she wanted to go to cosmetology school but she never finished.

Q9: What are your perceptions regarding any behavioral difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, fighting with peers or being defiant to caregiver)?

Q9a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q9b. What type of assistance did they receive for those difficulties?

Q9c. What type of assistance do you think would have the most helpful?

Darla: Both my kids had behavior problems but it came out in different ways. Mostly their behavior while I was gone was very angry. They became very belligerent and angry. They would cuss at people and when I came home they would say things to me because I hadn't been there. My daughter would twist things that I would say to her and become very angry. When she tried to get a little job, she wasn't able to keep it because she would get angry on the job and cuss people out or say things to people and they would have to let her go. She would have an attitude on the job and her behavior wasn't right. You can't keep a job when your behavior is like that because people don't know if you are going to do something to them or something because of the anger. I knew that her behavior wasn't right and my son because my family was telling me about their behavior. I didn't know what had happened to my daughter until I got home. I thought they were just angry at me. I tried to get them some help when I got out but they wouldn't talk to anyone about the things that were bothering them. My family didn't know what to do. My brothers and sister tried to talk with them but that wasn't enough, especially for my daughter.

Q10: What are your perceptions regarding any educational difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, referral to a school psychologist or counselor)?

Q10a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q10b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?

Q10c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Darla: Well I know my son wasn't going to school like he was suppose to because he was hanging out with the dope boys and my daughter wasn't doing well in school either. She had a hard time concentrating in school. I tried to encourage them to stay in school and get a good education but since I wasn't there it was hard. My son ended up dropping out and my daughter tried but she couldn't focus and learn in school because of the sexual abuse. She tried to go to a cosmetology program but she wasn't able to finish. When they were younger they did alright in school so they never needed any kind of help. I

made sure they had what they needed. They dressed nice and they had everything. I made sure when I was home that they had what they needed for school because when I was in school I didn't have the clothes and the kids would pick at me and I didn't want to go and I also started stealing so I could have nice things. They had all the latest stuff and the best stuff so all they had to do was go to school and learn. I think as they got older when I wasn't around they just didn't care about school.

Q11. Tell me about your reunification with your children. Describe any social, emotional, behavioral or educational difficulties they have experienced since your return home. What type of assistance are they receiving for these difficulties?

Darla: Well when I came home this last time my son and daughter came back to live with me. My son was still hanging out with a bad bunch and a couple of times I had to go out in the street to confront him about what he was doing, selling drugs. He had dropped out of school and was running with the dope boys. I put myself in danger going out in the streets to get him. I did all sorts of things for my kids. When I got a job they would come up to my job to get money and I would give them like \$300.00 dollars at a time. I felt like I was paying them for being away from them. I tried to encourage them to stay in school and to talk with somebody but they wouldn't. My daughter said she didn't want to talk with anyone and my son was in the streets. He was stealing stuff from the family so he had to find someplace else to live and I was really worried about him. Since they were older it was harder to get them to get some help and to talk with someone.

#### **Mother #5(Earlene)**

Q1: Tell me about the circumstances surrounding your incarceration?

Earlene: The circumstances about my incarceration was drug abuse, homelessness, and ah, the murder of, the reason I was incarcerated was because of the incidence of a murder charge of my children's father. We got into a fight over drugs. I was incarcerated in Franklin County in Columbus, Ohio.

Q2: While you were incarcerated who cared for your children?

Earlene: I thank God that I had a mother and a sister. My mother and my sister took care of my children while I was incarcerated, nothing like mom, but I knew they were well cared for.

Q3: Describe your concerns about their care.

Earlene: I did have concerns because my mother had my oldest son and my sister had my two younger children and I knew my mother favored my oldest one more than she did my two youngest and there was a split right there and she didn't want to be bothered with the youngest two. She just wanted him and there was a thing with them and her where they never really felt like they were wanted by her. It's still an issue.

Q4: What type of information were you able to receive about the care and well-being of your children while you were incarcerated? Who provided you with that information?

Earlene: I was pretty well informed. I stayed well informed about what was going on with them, with school and all. I would call my mother and my sister and talk with them and they would allow the children to talk to me and I was pretty well informed.

Q5: How often were your children able to visit you while you were incarcerated? Describe your visits.

Earlene: The children were able to visit about three times while I was in there, because my mom said that it was too painful for her to see me there. We had pretty good visits. They were pretty good; they were as well as could be expected. I wasn't able to really touch them or have any real contact. We talked a lot. The visits were good for me to see that they were alright but I'm sure it was hard for them to see me there and not be able to be with me. They were able to see me and that was the most important thing.

Q6: How did the visits with your children affect your relationship while you were incarcerated?

Earlene: I think by them seeing me and seeing that I was alright was good for them and for me. They were able to see me and I think that with the charges that were upon me, the murder charges, they thought that they would never be able to see me anymore. They didn't know if it was going to be the end of me because it was already the end of their father. So it was kind of like giving them some relief and security to know that I still loved them and that I would still be there for them. My oldest son use to tell me all the time that he thought that he wasn't going to ever see me again. That was hard on him and on my other two children too.

Q7: What are your perceptions regarding any social difficulties your daughter experienced during your incarceration?

Q7a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

- Q7b. What type of assistance did she receive for these difficulties?  
Q 7c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Earlene: Well I would say that they did have social problems. I guess you would call them that, yes I would believe so. They really didn't want to get close to people. I know that. They are just now starting to get out and get to know people and to form relationships with people. They use to think that any people they would get close to would leave them. So that was one of their issues and not being able to focus and concentrate in school. They didn't get any help until I got out and got back to them. I was at the shelter for eight months without my children. It was transitional housing for women to help with getting a job and getting my children back. When I got them back I was able to get them some help. I knew the needs they needed and I was in a program myself for counseling. I came out of the shelter and got myself together and received custody back. I was in family transitional housing and they really worked closely with my family and we worked with different counseling programs and my social worker. My social worker helped me to make sure I got help for my kids and tutoring for their education and different things like that. It was a really good program that I went through.

Q8: What are your perceptions regarding any emotional difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration?

- Q8a. What was the nature of those difficulties?  
Q8b. What type of assistance did they receive for those difficulties?  
Q8c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Earlene: Oh, yes most definitely I would say that they had emotional issues. They didn't trust me at first when we first got back together. They couldn't sleep, they were scared. They didn't know if I would be gone when they woke up. They would cry a lot. We slept together a lot when we first got back together because we had to reestablish that bond with each other. So that was a big emotional thing. My daughter was very emotional. She cried a lot; even after I came home she cried a lot. There were a lot of emotions with my daughter and with my boys also. My son who was being raised by my mother started acting in a very effeminate way. He still behaves that way now that we are back together. He is very emotional. He cries easily and gets very upset easily. My children didn't get any help like professional help while I was incarcerated. My family was there for them but they didn't really know how to help. They provided food and a roof over their heads, but they couldn't really help. They did get counseling once I got out and got them back and I think they needed that.

Q9: What are your perceptions regarding any behavioral difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, fighting with peers or being defiant to caregiver)?

Q9a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q9b. What type of assistance did they receive for those difficulties?

Q9c. What type of assistance do you think would have the most helpful?

Earlene: Yes, yes, my oldest son became very, very angry while I was away. He could not stand people and he didn't want to be around anyone. He was angry because I wasn't there and because our family was not together. All he wanted was to make sure the house was clean and everything around him was clean and he wanted to make sure the family would get back together and not break up. My daughter wanted to be the silly putty, the clown. She clowned around a lot and my youngest son, he shut down totally. He didn't want to talk, he didn't want to share. He's still very quiet and won't talk much but he still needs to get some things out. The counseling has helped but he probably would be better if he had some help when I first was incarcerated.

Q10: What are your perceptions regarding any educational difficulties your children experienced during your incarceration (for example, referral to a school psychologist or counselor)?

Q10a. What was the nature of those difficulties?

Q10b. What type of assistance did they receive for these difficulties?

Q10c. What type of assistance do you think would have been the most helpful?

Earlene: My youngest son had the problems in school. He was so quiet that they just overlooked him in school. He would go to the bathroom on himself. He totally shut down in school. He said he would raise his hand and the teacher would not call on him so he just shut down. The teacher said they didn't know that he was in the class until I came for Open House. My other two kids did alright in school and didn't have any problems. My son didn't get any help from the school because they said he wasn't a problem. I tried to get him tested and everything but the schools wouldn't do anything even though he shut down and wasn't learning anything. They said they did interventions or something but he still wasn't learning right. He got some help from Sylvan and then the counseling when I got them all back. I think the counseling helped the most. We all needed that.

Q11. Tell me about your reunification with your children. Describe any social, emotional, behavioral or educational difficulties they have experienced since your return home. What type of assistance are they receiving for these difficulties?

Earlene: Well when I got out of the halfway house and we got back together, like I said, there were a lot of trust issues. They were scared that I would go back to prison or that something else would happen. For a long time they were scared. I had to reassure them that I wasn't going to get involved in anymore relationships until God was ready and with their permission. The kids were getting counseling so they would know that I was not going anywhere and not going back to doing what I was doing before. We are doing better now. They are doing better now, we are pretty close. I went to a very nice church and the pastor was concerned about me and my kids. At the time he wanted me to be safe and not to get involved in any more bad relationships. He wanted me to be spiritually fit and emotionally fit because I had a tendency to be in abusive relationships.

## APPENDIX E

### TABLES FROM STUDY

Table 1

General Demographics of the Mothers

Name	Reason for incarceration	Term of sentence	Times in prison	Age	Number of children	Age of children
Anna	Drug Abuse	1 year	1	36	2	14 & 10
Beverly	Aggravated Assault	15 months	2	27	2	7
Carmen	Theft	14 months	1	21	1	3
Darla	Grand Theft	4 years	3	34	2	12 & 13
Earlene	Murder	2 years	1	30	3	11, 8 & 7

Table 2

Difficulties Experienced by the Children of the Incarcerated Mothers in the Study

Name	Social Difficulties	Emotional Difficulties	Behavioral Difficulties	Educational Difficulties
Anna's Son	No	Yes	No	Yes
Anna's daughter	Yes	Yes	No	No
Beverly's Twin Son	No	No	Yes	No
Beverly's Twin Son	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carmen's daughter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Darla's son	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Darla's daughter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Earlene's daughter	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Earlene's oldest son	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Earlene's second son	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes